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NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

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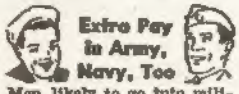

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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

November, 1943 Cover by A. R. Tilburne

LONG NOVELETTE

THE VALLEY OF THE ASSASSINS . . . . . **Edmond Hamilton** 8

A valley of dreadful doom, this . . . where time is as nothing to the fiend whose first murderous crimes were committed centuries ago

SHORT STORIES

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So you don't like to have your relatives around! Suppose they were dead . . . and still around!

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When we tinker with black forces beyond our ken we must expect the unexpected

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If you shoot those guys over there, he wondered, then they got to play right and fall down, don't they?

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Our doctrines had not warned us that on this night all hidden powers above and below are loosened

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Vol. 37, No. 2

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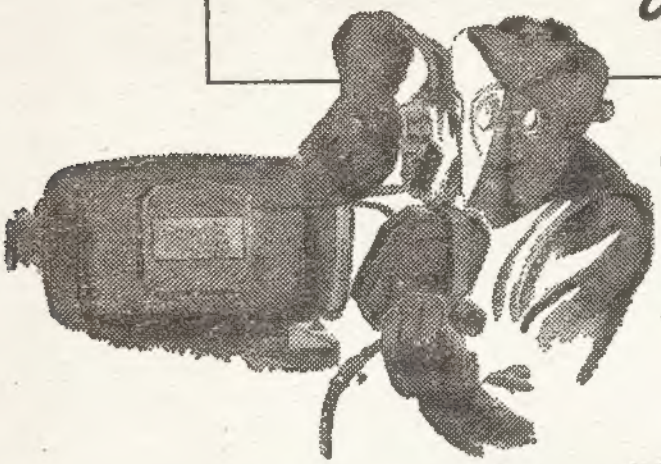
D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

The Memory of an Atom



Can The Past Be Awakened--

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WERE THE ANCIENTS RIGHT? Does the whirling heart of an atom contain the secret of the universe? If everything from a grain of sand to the mighty stars—including man—is composed of atoms, do these particles contain the *infinite intelligence* which ordained and directs all things? Shall man at last find within them his true purpose in the scheme of things?

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The Shape of Thrills to Come

THE MASTER OF COTSWOLD

By Nelson S. Bond

HE WAS warned not to *peek beyond* . . . but there was something compelling about the sinister forces at work in the Hollow . . . forces that come with the unearthly piping as darkness steals over the land, and go leaving behind the tramplings of horrendous hooves!

Bon Voyage, Michele

a long novelette

By SEABURY QUINN

THE ancient castle was not far from the native heath of werewolves . . . and on a cold and snowy night anything can happen.

The Sea Shell

a new short story by

RAY BRADBURY

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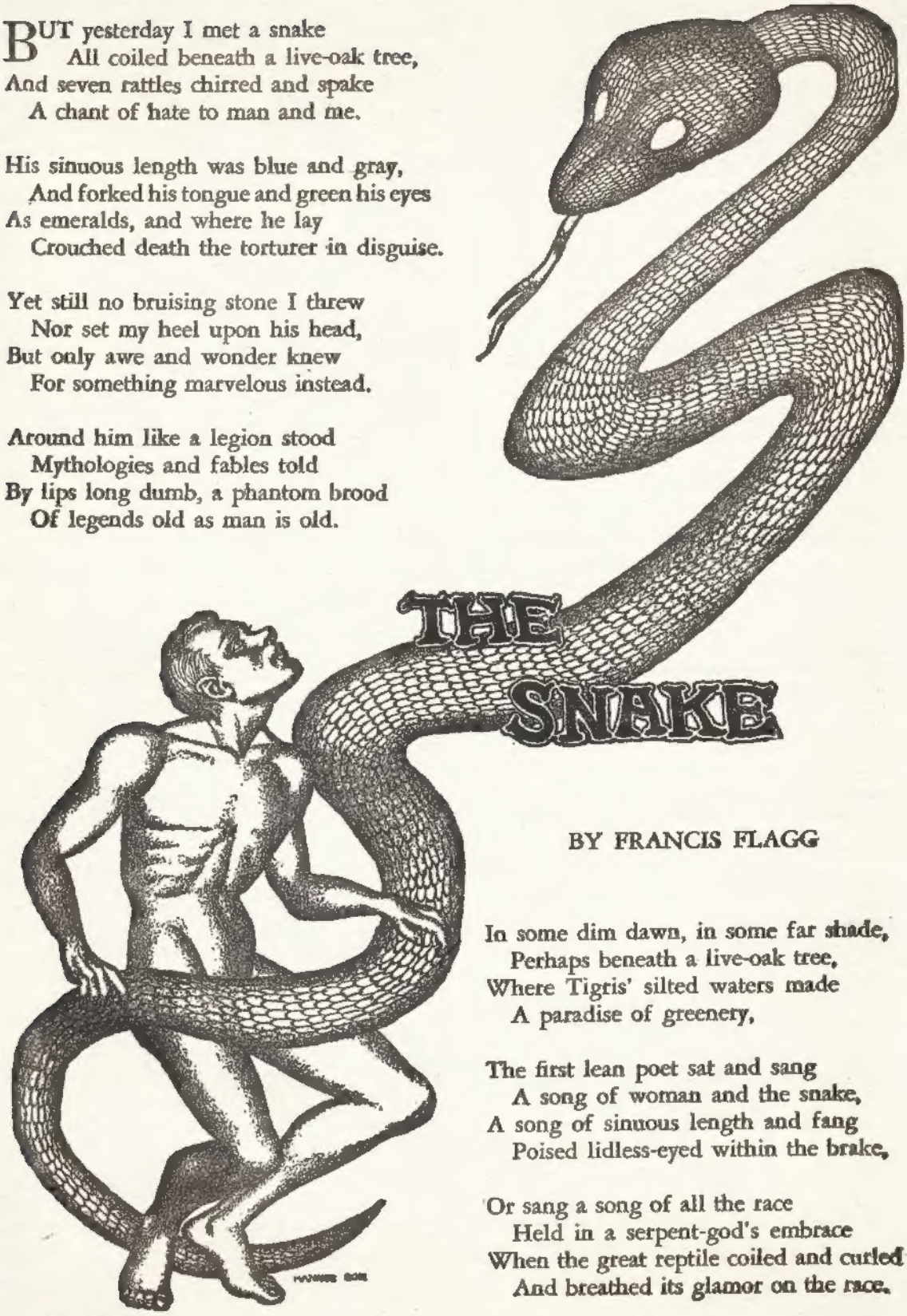
BUT yesterday I met a snake
All coiled beneath a live-oak tree,
And seven rattles chirred and spake
A chant of hate to man and me.

His sinuous length was blue and gray,
And forked his tongue and green his eyes
As emeralds, and where he lay
Crouched death the torturer in disguise.

Yet still no bruising stone I threw
Nor set my heel upon his head,
But only awe and wonder knew
For something marvelous instead.

Around him like a legion stood
Mythologies and fables told
By lips long dumb, a phantom brood
Of legends old as man is old.



THE SNAKE

BY FRANCIS FLAGG

In some dim dawn, in some far shade,
Perhaps beneath a live-oak tree,
Where Tigris' silted waters made
A paradise of greenery,

The first lean poet sat and sang
A song of woman and the snake,
A song of sinuous length and fang
Poised lidless-eyed within the brake,

Or sang a song of all the race
Held in a serpent-god's embrace
When the great reptile coiled and curled
And breathed its glamor on the race.

You may be sitting pretty now . . . but . . .

AFTER WAR, WHAT?

You are probably sitting pretty now. Almost anyone can get a fair job with good money.

But when peace comes, when millions of men come out of the army and navy, when industry converts back—where will you be? There will be keen competition between companies and readjustments of many jobs. Will you be one whom industry labels "Must Keep"—even lists for promotion?

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The Valley of the Assassins

MARK STANTON felt sharp premonition of disaster as he heard the distant chorus of yells from his native laborers. There was stark terror in that shout of the hundred-odd Persian workers.

"The peacock of death!" they were babbling in the native Iranian tongue. "It is the sign of the Sons of Murder!"

"The Sons of Murder?" repeated Stanton. "What the devil's got into them now? Come on, Billy."

The young American chief-engineer started on the run along the sun-scorched single railway track. His chunky, muscular, khaki-clad figure was spurred by an alarm which was mirrored in his square brown face and hard black eyes.

Billy Bradley, his youthful assistant in the job of maintaining this section of the Trans-Iranian Railway, hastily followed him around the bend of the winding track, toward the source of the noisy clamor of terror.

The track wound between the looming precipices of the tremendous Elburz Mountains, that mighty range whose unmapped peaks and cliffs wall northern Iran from the Caspian. Vast, rocky shoulders rose in climbing heights of mystery toward the towering peak of Demavend.

This wilderness was one of the least-known regions of the whole Middle East, indeed, of all Asia. And this frail single thread of railway that ran through its frowning passes to the Caspian was the most vital railway in the world. It was the Burma Road of Russia—the single highway along which American and English munitions could flow to the embattled Soviets.

The mindless Sons of Murder are feared for what they are—but more for whom they serve!

That was why American engineers were here to keep it operating.

Mark Stanton had that urgent necessity on his mind as he ran forward. "If the men stop work now, we'll never get that slide cleared away. And not a train can run until we do!"

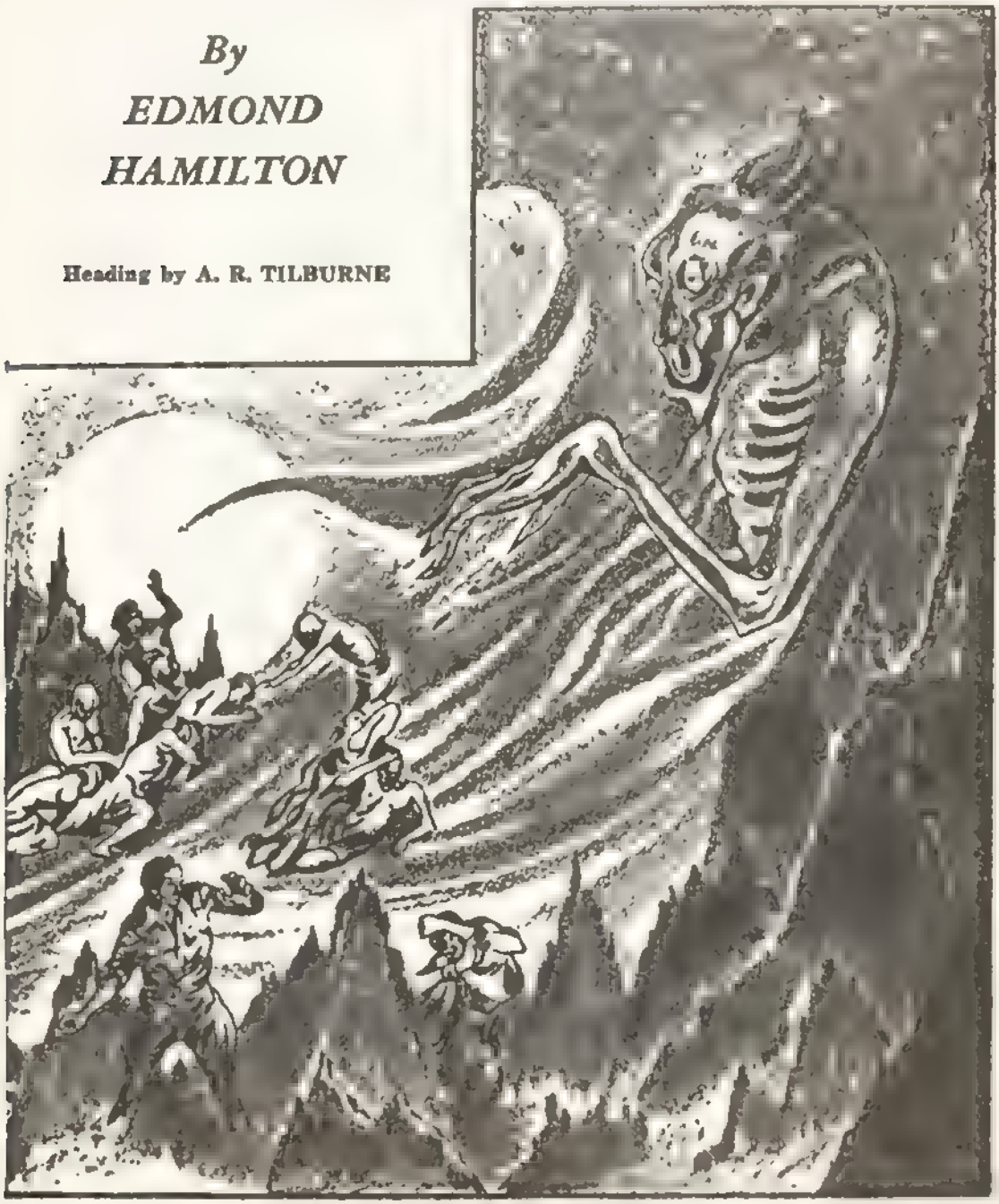
"They seem scared to death," muttered young Billy Bradley as they rounded the curve. "What's the matter with them, anyway?"

Stanton and his assistant engineer had come into view of the catastrophic rockslide that for a week had blocked all traf-

By

EDMOND HAMILTON

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE



fic. The great mass of rocks across the pass was not large now, for the Persian workers had been toiling for six days to remove it.

But the dark-faced Persians were not plying pick and shovel now. They had thrown down their tools and formed a panic-stricken mob which was trying to bolt down the track toward the camp. The lank, towering figure of Angus McLachlan, Scotch second engineer, was all that held them back.

Stanton shouted harshly to the white-clad, dark-faced throng, in Persian. "Get back there! What do you mean by stopping work? Is it for this that we're paying you triple wages?"

"We work here no longer, *khan!*" yelled a terrified Persian who was in the front of the mob. "The shadow of death lies over this place. The Sons of Murder have given us warning to leave."

"The Sons of Murder? What are you talking about?" Stanton demanded.

"The Assassins!" screeched another Persian. His face was a muddy gray with terror. They all surged forward, with that man in the lead.

WHACK! Stanton's hard fist caught the ringleader on the jaw, and the man went down like a poled ox. The others halted.

"Anyone else who tries to desert his work will get the same medicine," Stanton promised.

The men sullenly faced him, muttering to each other and looking behind them at the half-cleared mass of rock with dread in their faces.

Fizar Khan, the middle-aged Persian official who was attached to Stanton's camp, came hurrying to the scene. He looked worried.

"What has happened here?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, what the devil set them off, Mac?" Stanton asked the tall second engineer.

The big Scot shrugged bony shoulders, his craggy face dour as he spat contemptuously on the ground.

"Ah, the chiels are crazy," growled McLachlan. "They came up here with me to work, same as any other morning. Then they went out of their wits, because they happened to see yon bird."

He pointed at the creature that was the focus of the Persian workers' scared glances. Upon the mass of rock that blocked the track there perched a black peacock of unusual size.

The bird was tethered to the rock, by a cord attached to its leg. It was strutting its great tail as though in anger, uttering a discordant cry. Underneath it, on the rock, was scrawled a curious cabalistic symbol in bright red.

Fizar Khan's olive face went sickly yellow as he looked. *"Insballah!"* he muttered hoarsely. "It is the warning of the Assassins!"

"What is all this stuff about Assassins?" Billy Bradley demanded puzzledly. "Why should that peacock scare the men?"

Fizer Khan gulped and looked fearfully up at the frowning, mysterious precipices as he answered. "It is a black thing from Persia's past. For nearly a thousand years, the shadow of Hasan Sabah's dreadful band has lain over these wild regions."

Mark Stanton dimly remembered half-forgotten reading. "You mean that the ancient society of the Assassins still exists?"

The Persian nodded nervously. "It has persisted since it was founded nearly ten centuries ago by Hasan Sabah, the most dreaded master of black magic Asia has ever known. The word 'assassin' itself originated from his name.

"Hasan Sabah founded a terrible society of murder! His guarded stronghold of Alamut was somewhere in these northern mountains. Legend says that it was an impregnable castle-eyrie in a valley high in

these peaks—a valley lovely as the gardens of paradise.

"In that paradise, Hasan gathered fanatic followers whom he sent forth to slay all who crossed his will. He struck down kings, Crusaders, great khans, at his will. For he had somehow the magic power of rendering his followers utterly obedient to his will, of making them mere mindless tools of murder. That's why he, the master of the Assassins, was so dreaded."

"But surely that all died out long ago, man!" protested Angus McLachlan.

FIZAR shook his head emphatically. "The Assassins' secret empire has never died out. Their hidden valley Alamut is still a stronghold of mystery and murder. Indeed, there are those who say that the original Hasan Sabah himself still rules the order, somehow living on and on."

"Nonsense!" declared young Bradley incredulously. "It's more likely that Nazi spies put this thing here, to scare the workers and keep the railway out of commission.

"See, there are tracks of horses leading from and back into the mountains. If I could trail them—"

"Allah forbid!" Fizar exclaimed. "No man dares trail the emissaries of the dreaded order."

Bradley stepped forward and contemptuously freed the black peacock, and kicked the screeching bird away. Instantly a yell of renewed terror came from the Persian laborers.

"The Feringhi has violated the warning of the Assassins!" cried one of them horrifiedly. "Now all of us are marked for doom!"

They scrambled forward again, mad with superstitious fear and determined to bolt out of the narrow pass back to the camp.

Stanton's automatic jumped into his hand and barked curtly. The lead slugs whistling over the heads of the panicky workers abruptly brought them to a halt again.

"Are you children to be frightened by a bird?" Stanton asked them loudly in Persian. "It cannot harm you—but I can and I will unless you get back to work."

The Persians were caught between two fears. Their fear of the hard-faced American's gun proved strongest.

Sullenly, they picked up their discarded tools and began to work slowly upon the removal of the mass of rock. But they cast frightened glances up at the looming mountains as they labored.

Stanton strode grimly among them, his presence and the gun at his belt emphasizing his commands. His voice snapped orders that sent the work into a somehow faster tempo. In a short time, the narrow pass was ringing with the clink of picks and spades.

The rattle of a horse's hoofs made him turn sharply. He glimpsed Billy Bradley's pony disappearing up the transverse gorge that led westward into the mountains.

"What the devil—where has Bradley gone?" Stanton demanded. "Just when I need him—"

"He thought he'd trail the scuts who put that peacock here," answered Angus McLachlan.

"He is crazy," swore Fizar Khan, sweating. "He'll never come back if he should happen to overtake the emissaries of Alamut."

"That fool kid!" exclaimed Stanton angrily. "He would go off on a wild-goose chase without orders. I'll dress him down plenty for it when he gets back."

But Bradley did not return all through that day. The work in the pass went forward hour after hour, and the Persian workers seemed to have recovered a little from their superstitious terror during the day.

Night pressed down black and solid as Stanton called a halt to the labor. The Per-

sians gladly hastened back out of the gloomy pass to the camp of tents farther south along the railway. Their cooking fires soon ringed the camp, lighting the white tents redly with their shaking rays. Stanton heard chanting and the thump of a drum as he came out of his own tent later.

"They're chanting the Daevasta—the spell against evil," murmured Fizar Khan. "Night has brought back all their fears."

Stanton paid little attention. His eyes vainly searched the starlit vista of distant peaks for a moving figure.

"Why the devil doesn't Bradley get back? Do you suppose he's lost up there?"

"He will never come back if he has overtaken the emissaries of the Assassins." Fizar Khan's voice was heavy with foreboding.

"I'm thinking," drawled big McLachlan, "that it's more likely there are Nazi agents up in yon hills than your bogey Assassins."

"Mac's right," bit out Stanton. "There were plenty of Hitler's agents here in Iran before the Allies occupied it. They'd be smart enough to play on native superstitions to keep this railway blocked. By Heaven, I believe now that that landslide that blocked it was no accident, but—"

A shrill cry cut him off. It came from the nearby camp of the Persian workers.

A MAN was riding through the camp. Stanton saw with a feeling of sharp relief that it was Billy Bradley.

Then, as the youngster came into their circle of firelight and dismounted, Stanton stiffened. Bradley was—changed. His cleancut young face was now a stiff white mask, empty of all expression. His eyes looked sunken and glazed, and he approached them in a clumsy, jerky stride.

"What the devil—have you been drinking?" Stanton demanded of the young engineer. "If you've gone off and got swacked, now of all times—"

Fizar's sharp cry interrupted. The Persian's eyes were bulging. "It is the magic of the Assassins! Look at his eyes!"

Things incredible happened with stupifying swiftness. Bradley suddenly jerked out his belt pistol. It coughed viciously, and Stanton heard the first slug whistle past him and heard a choking cry from McLachlan. A second shot followed the first.

He couldn't believe his own eyes. This couldn't be happening. Billy Bradley, coming back from the hills like a dead-faced ghost of his former self, and trying to *kill* them!

II

THE instinct of self-preservation can order the body into action while the brain is too stunned to issue commands. That happened so with Stanton now.

He was plunging forward a second after Bradley fired the first time. The flame of the second shot was close against his side as he lunged inside Bradley's guard and knocked the youngster to the ground.

Bradley struggled like a fiend, flailing with the gun. His glazed eyes glared with a soulless fury into Stanton's face, in the moonlight. Yet he fought in utter silence.

"Allah, he is an Assassin himself now!" Fizar was screeching. "Look at his face!"

Stanton's hair bristled with the horror of this struggle with a mindless human thing that only a few hours before had been his friend.

Revulsion lent strength to his blows. He got hold of the gun-hand of this clawing thing that had been Billy Bradley. His right hand came up in a jolting uppercut.

Bradley's chin snapped back. The youngster dropped the gun and sprawled, half-dazed. Instantly, Stanton was on him.

"Bring me a rope!" he yelled. "He's out of his head—we'll have to tie him up."

Fizar brought a tent-cord. The Persian workers were gathering in a babbling throng around the scene, but none of them would come near.

Stanton got the young engineer's hands and feet bound before he regained full consciousness. As Bradley came out of the daze, his foaming, raging fury was that of a trapped leopard. He strained against his bonds, seeking with mindless fury to get at them.

Stanton felt sick at the sight. He heard the hoarse, shaken cry of Fizar.

"He is an Assassin, now—he is one of the soulless killers! They stole his soul, up there in the mountains, and sent him back down here to kill."

"The sign of the peacock warned of Hasan's wrath!" screeched a Persian in the terrified throng.

Again, the superstitious Persian laborers wavered on the brink of complete flight. Again, Stanton's voice lashed at them.

"Go back to your tents! There is nothing of the Assassins in this. Bradley Khan is delirious from an accident—that is all."

But he didn't believe it himself, any more than did the terrified Persians who streamed away toward their campfires. He knew that something deep and awful had happened up in the mountains to Bradley—something that had transformed him into an only semi-human thing.

He ignored the foaming, raging thing while he bent over Angus McLachlan. The Scotchman had taken the first bullet in his shoulder and was lying, holding his hand against the wound, his craggy face pale with pain.

"I'll be all right, if you'll help me into the tent," he murmured.

Stanton did so, and when McLachlen was stretched on one of the cots, he bound and sterilized the wound.

Then he dragged in the threshing form of Bradley and put him on the other cot. In the light of the gasoline lantern, Bradley's waxy face was a rigid mask as his hollow eyes burned up at his superior.

He spoke to Bradley, shook him, shouted in his ear. It had no effect. The youngster only continued to struggle against his bonds.

"I feared this," Fizar babbled. "The hand of the Assassins has reached toward us. They stole the soul of Bradley Khan and then—"

"Will you stop this talk of soul-stealing?" rasped Stanton. "That's all moonshine. Something happened to him up there in the mountains, some accident."

Yet a deep inner horror made his scalp crawl, as he spoke. Something dark and dreadful had befallen the young engineer up in those mystery-guarded peaks. Some uncanny metamorphosis that had lifted young Bradley's personality from his body.

Could it be true that a centuries-old brotherhood of evil still nested in this little-known recess of ancient Asia? Were there black powers of a science far different from modern material science, yet as potent in its own way?

STANTON shook off the creeping chill that encompassed him, and bent over Bradley. "Billy, come out of it! It's Mark talking—*Mark!*"

Bradley gave no sign of recognition. His sunken, glazed eyes glared up in that hollow, dreadful stare. He writhed wildly on the cot.

"He is under the spell of the Master of Assassins," muttered Fizar. "His mind has only one idea—to complete the mission on which he was sent, and then return to Alamut."

Night was passing. Stanton strode out to rouse the workers for the day. He stopped in the misty dawn, his haggard face tightening.

The Persians were gone. Their tents and ponies had vanished, and the only sign of them was the still smoking ashes of dying campfires.

"The damned deserters!" raged Stanton. "If I'd known that they were sneaking away—"

"You could not have stopped them," said Fizar fatalistically. "They saw Bradley Khan go into the mountains, and they saw him come back—a soulless Assassin. Nobody could have prevented their flight, then."

"They've got to come back!" Stanton exclaimed. "Do you realize that six trains loaded with tanks and planes are waiting down in Tehran for this block to be cleared. Those trains can mean victory or defeat for the Russians. They *must* go through—"

He abruptly checked himself. Talking was not going to do any good. He was left alone here now, with a wounded man, a crazed youngster, and a superstition-ridden Persian. It was up to him to *do* something.

Stanton strode back into the tent. McLachlan was getting up painfully from his cot.

"Mac, could you take the gasoline-car back down the line to Tehran, by yourself?" Stanton asked the Scotchman.

McLachlan nodded. "Aye, my shoulder's none so bad. But I don't want to leave you in the lurch, lad."

"You've got to. I want you to tell HQ down in Tehran that our workers have deserted and that we'll need a full new crew at once."

McLachlan's face lengthened. "I'll do that. But I fear 'twill be little use. Ye know how news spreads in this devil-ridden land. When the natives hear the Assassins are at work here, will any of them come?"

"I'm going to take care of this Assassin business, while you're gone," Stanton bit out. "I think the whole thing is the work of a few Nazi agents up in those mountains. And I'm going to get them!"

McLachlan made further objections. But Stanton bundled the wounded Scotchman out onto the light gasoline car that would take him down the railway to Tehran in a few hours.

When it was ready to start, Stanton turned to Fizar Khan. "You staying here, or going?"

Fizar gulped. His face was pallid underneath its olive hue, and his dread was manifest. Yet he spoke evenly, proudly.

"I think you do not know the danger of what you propose to do. Yet I stay with you."

Stanton felt contrition for his curtness. He nodded to McLachlan, and started the motor for him. The gas-car was soon out of sight, speeding south along the winding railway.

They went back into the tent. Billy Bradley was moaning now, writhing in his bonds as though tortured by inward agony. He kept straining to reach the door of the tent.

"The spell of the Master draws him back toward Alamut," whispered Fizar. "That is what has always happened—the mindless murderers who are sent forth are drawn back by irresistible compulsion."

"Nonsense," muttered Stanton. But there was no conviction in his voice now.

FOR Billy Bradley *was* straining with agonized insistence toward the door of the tent, toward the northwest. There was, in the pallid mask of the young engineer's face, a superhuman, tortured yearning such as might have lain upon the face of Lucifer looking back at the heaven from which he fell.

Stanton felt the hairs bristling on his neck. There was something hideously animal-like in the blind striving of Bradley.

"Billy, wake up!" he cried fiercely in the youngster's ear. He grabbed his shoulders and shook him. "Snap out of it!"

Bradley's sunken eyes never even flickered toward him. The young engineer still writhed blindly to reach the door of the tent.

For hours, Stanton worked over him. He used the limited resources of the medicine-chest, but none of the restoratives or seda-

tives he tried had the slightest effect upon Bradley.

"It is no use," muttered the Persian sickly. "Once a man has become an Assassin, only death can lift the spell."

Stanton ripped an oath, glaring out toward the peaks that loomed dark against the sunset. "Damn it, if somebody up there *has* deliberately done this to Billy, I'll hunt them out and pay them off for it."

Fizer shrugged hopelessly. "You'll never find them. Many times, the government at Tehran has sent soldiers into these mountains searching for the Assassins. And they have not found their stronghold."

"I'll find it!" Stanton said savagely. "Some way I'll—"

He stopped suddenly. His eyes, fixed upon the writhing Bradley, narrowed.

"By Heaven, here's our way to find Alamut or whatever other place of devils is responsible for it all!" he said. "Billy!"

Fizar stared. "I don't understand."

"Billy will guide us back there!" Mark Stanton said swiftly. "He's out of his head, obsessed somehow with the blind urge to go back to the devils who sent him down on this murder-mission. All right, we'll unbind his legs and let him go. And we'll go with him."

Fizar's dark eyes flashed panic. "Allah, no! Two men search for Alamut, with an Assassin himself for guide? It's madness!"

"We've got to go," Stanton persisted. "We'll get no workers back on this job until the superstitious menace here is cleared up and destroyed."

He swiftly inspected his pistol, then drew his knife and bent to cut the bonds around Bradley's ankles. He paused, looking up.

"I forgot, Fizar—you believe in these superstitions about the Assassins yourself. Well, I can go by myself. I won't really need you."

Fizar's high-bred face was a study in conflicting pride and dread. And pride—pride of the most ancient blood in the world—won.

"I go with you," he said quietly. "But I think that if Bradley leads us to Alamut, we will die, or worse. What can two men do against the Assassin's devils and powers?"

"Hell, man—I'm not proposing a harebrained attempt to mop up the whole thing by ourselves," retorted Stanton. "We'll simply find out who's behind all this superstitious sabotage. If it's Nazi agents, as I believe, and there's more than a few of them, we'll come back and lead a company of troops up there. This road has got to be cleared!"

He had cut through Bradley's anklebonds. The crazed youngster scrambled with wild eagerness to his feet, and lunged toward the door.

Stanton caught him, in time. Though Bradley spat and struggled, he grabbed the youngster's bound hands and hauled him back.

"Can't take a chance of him getting away," he muttered. "But it makes me sick to treat Billy like the brute animal they've made of him."

Fizer caught three horses and brought them across the deserted, sunset-lit camp. They helped Bradley clamber into the saddle of one, while the Persian held the lead-rein of that horse. He would not be able to escape.

Then, with Bradley riding between them, they trotted out of the camp toward the transverse gorge that led westward up into the mountains.

BLACK awesome peaks of mystery loomed against the blood-red sunset. Through gaps between them could be glimpsed still higher and farther crags of the mighty Elburz Range, shouldering skyward like vague ghost-mountains in the distance.

Their horses' hoofs rang on stones in the floor of the dry gorge. The way slanted steeply upward, twisting and turning but always climbing.

Bradley's horse led, guided by the knee-pressure of the bound, crazed youngster. In the dying light, Bradley's face was still a hollow mask lit only by a twitching, consuming eagerness to move on.

"Like a drug-slave, trying to get back to his dope," muttered Stanton. "What in the world was done to him?"

"It is the Master's spell, that drags him back to Alamut," reiterated Fizar somberly. "It is always so, with the Assassins."

"Will you forget that Assassin legend?" demanded Stanton. "He tried to kill us, yes—but because he was out of his head. He's not trying to get at us now."

"He is taking us back to Alamut," murmured the Persian. "To death. He does not need to kill us himself."

STANTON snorted, but made no further answer. Their ponies were laboring now, climbing a steep trail that led along the side of a ledge so narrow that they had to ride in single file.

The bloody sunset faded to a gray twilight that swiftly darkened. A little wind began to moan down from the peaks. There burgeoned forth the burning cressets of the Persian stars.

Stanton felt the chill and thinness of the air. They were already several thousand feet up from the lowland level of the railway, and still climbing. Bradley led up through the darkness with strange sureness.

"How can he know the way so certainly?" Stanton wondered. "It's as though there *is* something drawing him back."

Stanton did not credit Fizar's superstitious beliefs, but he did believe that there was trouble in case-lots somewhere up in these wild peaks.

It would be a tremendous coup for Nazi agents, if they were able to utilize native superstitions as a lever with which to close the Trans-Iranian Railway. Germany would risk a lot to cut that vital supply-line to the Soviets. There was some hell's-nest of espionage up ahead, he felt sure.

Bradley had found it. And they had caught Bradley. They had done something to him—doped him, maybe. Whatever they had done, it had been enough to transform a fun-loving American youngster into the hollow-eyed, mindless creature who was feverishly leading them on.

Stanton swore to himself. "I owe them for that, whoever they are. If they've wrecked Billy's mind permanently—"

It was increasingly colder. They were much higher in the peaks, threading upward through labyrinthine gorges and canyons. Hours passed, and Stanton began to tire. Fizar drooped in his saddle, gasping the thin air. But Bradley still pressed on with that unhuman eagerness.

"No wonder your soldiers never found anything in here," muttered Stanton to the Persian. "What beats me is how Billy managed to find whoever he did find."

"I think that they found *him*," answered Fizar. His face was gray in the starlight.

They had entered a canyon that was only a few wards wide. A mere vertical crack high in the rock mass of the range. The tired ponies splashed a tiny stream at its bottom as they plodded through the darkness.

Suddenly Billy Bradley raised his pallid face and uttered a weird, harsh, discordant cry. It echoed eerily between the canyon walls.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Stanton startledly. "That cry—"

"The scream of a peacock!" Fizar shouted. "A signal!"

Stanton's gun was already in his hand. But he had small chance to use it.

From the darkness about them dropped black figures who smacked them off their ponies. His breath was knocked from him

as he hit the ground, and men's bodies piled fiercely on him.

Stanton realized that these men had not merely rained from the darkness. They were sentries posted on ledges along the canyon, and they had answered Bradley's weird cry by this instant attack.

Struggling beneath his attackers, he got his finger on the trigger of his pistol. The gun roared muffledly, and he felt one of the men atop him jerk backward from the smack of the slug.

BUT no cry of pain came from that man! He continued to attack with mindless ferocity, though with steadily weakening grip.

"Allah!" came a choking cry from Fizar, off in the tumultuous darkness. "The Assassins—"

These men, whoever they were, weren't human! That was the hideous realization that overtook Mark Stanton as he fought. Human men would not take a pistol slug without even wincing!

He had no chance to fire another shot. The mass of his attackers pinned him down, and the gun was wrenched from his grasp. He felt his hands being expertly bound.

Not one word had been spoken by their attackers. The uncanny silence was the final element of horror. It was as though tangible ghosts had taken them. And then as he was jerked to his feet, he saw the dark figures of their captors more clearly. Some of these men were Persians, but there were Arabs, Syrians and Turks also. All wore native costume and all had the same hollow eyes and masklike faces as Bradley.

"The Sons of Murder," Fizar was choking. He was similarly bound, bleeding from a forehead wound, his face ghastly. "We let Bradley lead us right into their hands. I knew it would be so."

"Doped, all of them," panted Stanton. "Look at their faces. These men haven't any minds."

Mindless men! Truly they seemed so, these hollow-eyed creatures. They hauled Stanton and the Persian back up onto their ponies, binding the captives' ankles to their stirrups.

Bradley had joined them, and was one of them in every respect. Now the tall, dark Arab who seemed leader of the band spoke in a thick, mumbling voice.

"To Alamut!"

They started forward, riding up the narrow canyon and leading with them the horses upon which sat Stanton and Fizar Khan.

"You heard?" choked Fizar to his fellow-captive. "Alamut! The ancient stronghold of Hasan Sabah, the valley of the Assassins."

"I still can't believe it," muttered Stanton, his thoughts whirling. "The order of the Assassins can't have persisted for all these centuries. It's only a hideous legend—"

A legend that was coming true before his eyes! He had to admit it, even though his Twentieth Century intelligence refused possibility to such things.

For these stony-faced, zombie-like captors of theirs were in every respect like the Assassins of dread story who centuries before had cast a shadow of fear over all Asia and Europe. Men immune to fear or pain, men who committed any crime that their Master ordered, so that they could return to the hidden paradise of Alamut which he ruled.

These men were riding back toward their mysterious stronghold with a twitching eagerness in their hollow eyes. A weird avidity that seemed to draw them like a magnet.

"The spell of Hasan Sabah," Fizar was saying hoarsely. "It draws them back, as always. See it in their faces."

"Hasan Sabah died centuries ago," Stanton retorted. "There's no such things as spells—"

His voice trailed off. His eyes had rested upon one of the Assassins riding beside them in the narrow canyon.

The man was a Persian, a scrawny, sallow little man with that wax-stiff face and sunken eyes. He had a bullet-hole in his side, and blood was seeping from it.

It was the man who had taken Stanton's slug during that struggle in the canyon. That wound was mortal, Stanton knew. The man must be literally dying as he rode.

Yet he showed no sign of feeling pain or exhaustion! He rode forward as stiffly, as stonily, as the others.

A dying man, riding with these other dead-faced men toward the mysterious citadel of their dreaded order!

III

THE moon was rising. They had climbed steadily through a branching labyrinth of gorges, and the air had the thinness and coldness of extreme altitudes. Stanton's head spun from dizziness, and the air he gulped into his lungs seemed without oxygen.

He guessed they must be almost fifteen thousand feet up in the wild, high reaches of the mysterious Elburz. Then one of his captors pointed stiffly ahead, with a gesture of extreme eagerness.

His mumbling voice spoke a word. "Alamut!"

"Allah—look at it!" gasped Fizar.

Stanton was staring, as his pony jolted forward. They had entered a narrow chasm walled by high, vertical rock cliffs.

Up ahead of them, the chasm was blocked by a massive castle of black stone. It filled the narrow chasm from wall to wall, presenting a high, frowning face whose only openings were narrow loopholes and a massive bronze door. Its towers soared a hundred feet into the moonlight.

Stanton inspected it, stunned. This massive citadel looked ancient beyond belief. Like a monstrous survival of dead ages bulked its massive, crenellated walls and towers and keeps.

He saw men on guard in the embrasures of the walls, men who were watching them come up the steep chasm. He thought he glimpsed the muzzles of guns. Stanton realized the supreme impregnability of this spot. Ten men could hold it against an army.

"The citadel of Hasan," Fizar was babbling. "It is as legend tells of it. From this spot, for centuries, the Assassins have gone forth on missions of murder for their Master."

"This is just an old medieval stronghold of some kind," Stanton said through dry lips. "There's nothing strange about finding such a relic here in the wilds."

But he couldn't believe that, himself. Nothing strange? This place was the quintessense of forbidding strangeness. It brooded here in the moonlight like an ancient spider waiting for prey.

Bradley and their other captors were spurring eagerly up the steep trail toward the citadel. The unholy, twitching eagerness was stronger in the faces of the Assassins.

The massive bronze door slowly opened, as they approached. It was very high, and their little troop rode right through the opening.

The hooves of the ponies clattered on cobbled paving. Stanton heard the door grinding inexorably shut behind them.

"Dismount," said the Arab leader hollowly, in the Persian.

Their feet were untied from the stirrups, and they slid off the saddles. Wonderingly, Stanton looked around.

A vaulted passage of great height, in which they stood, ran right through the citadel like a tunnel. Its other end was open, and opened into the chasm beyond the castle.

They looked into the moonlit valley as green and beautiful as the legends of paradise! The chasm widened beyond the castle. Its thousand-foot cliffs were a quarter-mile apart, and extended for a mile to a point where the valley ended in a blind wall. Thus, this valley was really a blind pocket at the end of the chasm, sealed by the guarding castle.

Tall, nodding trees waved in the moonlight, above the silvered expanse of smooth lawns. Banks of flowers were massed everywhere, their fragrance drifting on the soft breeze. From the shadows came the exquisite songs of the bulbuls, the Persian nightingales. Such hushed peace and beauty was in that valley that Stanton stared, like a man rapt.

"The valley of the Assassins," Fizar was whispering. "The valley that is heaven—and hell—on earth!"

Bradley and most of the others of their captors were hastily moving through the passage. With hoarse shouts, as of men who return to paradise after exile, they hurried into that moonlit valley.

Stanton glimpsed other men in those silvered gardens, and girls or women also. But before he could see more, he and Fizar were roughly jerked into a doorway, and along a stone corridor of the castle.

"They're taking us to the Master—to Hasan himself," Fizar almost whimpered.

"Snap out of it, man!" muttered Stanton. "You're beaten before you start if you let superstition get you down."

But his own skepticism was badly shaken by what he had already seen. This place, so far, *did* exactly fit the centuries-old legends of the Assassins. That paradisal valley, and this grim, ancient citadel that guarded it—they were all as Marco Polo had described them, centuries ago.

It had existed then, the society of magic and murder. Could it have secretly continued to exist in these remote wilds, ever since?

"Hell, no," Stanton told himself fiercely. "It must be a Nazi trick—only the Germans would be trying to cut the Russian supply-line."

THE corridors and halls through which they were being taken were shadowy and cold, illuminated by swinging silver lamps.

At every portal stood hollow-eyed men with that chilling look of blankness on their faces. There were Europeans among them, as well as men of every race in Asia. All had guns, and long daggers, in their belts.

And these shadowy corridors of the brooding castle were also alive with—peacocks! The brilliant birds strolled to and fro, as though by right, uttering their harsh, discordant screams that echoed eerily through the stone halls.

Stanton began to remember, now. The peacock was the emblem of the devil, to most races of the Middle East. And it had also been the emblem of the Assassins, in the days of their invisible empire.

Then all this was torn from his mind as he and Fizar were led into a central hall of the castle, a vast stone chamber with vaulted roof.

Silver, incense-smoking lamps cast a soft glow in this great room, and two braziers burned with leaping red flames at its farther end. There, in a carven black chair upon a low, raised step of stone, a man sat watching them from amid a small crowd of silent guards and women.

"It is he," breathed Fizar Khan. "Hasan Sabah!"

But Stanton, staring ahead as they were taken forward, spoke with sharp relief.

"Forget that stuff. This is nothing but an old man."

He had been half expecting to meet, in the leader of these weird mindless men, a personage even more fearsome than they.

But this man who sat huddled in the low

chair, this Master of mysterious Alamut, was only a little, withered old man.

He was wrapped in a robe of heavy black silk worked with silver peacock-designs, that swathed his scrawny body to the chin. Only his claw-like hands and head were uncovered. His scant, graying hair was bare, and from a wizened, leathered brown face, two strangely luminous eyes inspected them. And, as the two prisoners were halted, the man laughed shrilly.

He spoke to Stanton. "Yes, you are right. I am an old man. Out there in the world, they used to call me the Old Man of the Mountain."

"The Old Man of the Mountain?" said Stanton, startledly. "Why, that's what Marco Polo called—"

He checked himself. And the withered oldster chuckled dryly.

"Yes, I remember Polo. He passed through this region late in the 14th century. A curiosity-seeking Venetian youngster, who came prying up into these mountains. I let him go on—he was of no use to us."

Stanton's jaw dropped. He stared at the wrinkled, bland face. "What the devil! Are you trying to tell me that—"

"That I was living six hundred years ago?" finished the other smoothly. "You find that incredible?"

Fizar's hoarse whisper came to Stanton. "I told you it was so. Hasan Sabah does not die—any more than Malik Taus, the devil, himself."

"Your companion, at least, does not doubt," purred Hasan Sabah. "But you Westerners have a neat scheme of theories, and you reject any fact which will not fit into it."

"Talk," rasped Stanton, "will never make me believe that you actually spoke with Marco Polo."

Hasan's withered face creased in a smile. "Why, man, I have spoken with more than Polo! For nearly a thousand years, the great ones of earth have passed in review before me. Many of them have been face to face with me—and many more have feared me.

"Omar Khayyam, the poet, was my schoolmate. The Crusaders who came blundering too close to this land knew me, to their cost—it was my servants who went forth and slew Conrad of Montferrat and others of them, and wrecked their enterprise. I knew Genghis Khan—a squat, burly Mongol who sent an army to destroy Alamut, but who later himself died under the daggers of my men.

"Tammerlane knew better—*he* let us alone. The Moguls of India later tried to root us out, but Akbar died for that, and after him, Jahangir. Napoleon, when he came invading the Middle East, at first refused my warning, but soon thought better of it when I'd showed my power. He was a cunning man, that little Corsican."

MARK STANTON struggled against a mounting feeling of belief. The mad impossibility of this old man's words was tempered by the unreal atmosphere of the place in which he stood.

The lofty, shadowy hall, the strutting, screeching peacocks, the hollow-eyed, zombie-like men and girls who stood silently, furnished a background that perfectly matched the fantastic assertions of this wizened, evil little spider of a man.

Stanton's mind clung desperately to realities, to the purpose which had brought him into this trap.

"Then it's your followers who have been blocking the Trans-Iranian rail line?" he challenged.

Hasan Sabah nodded negligently. "Of course. It is to my interest that that line be blocked, and that Russia shall fall."

Stanton's eyes narrowed. "I see. You're working for Germany—"

The old man laughed thinly. "Working for Germany? Why, your western nations and their wars mean nothing to me. I de-

sire the Russian power to collapse because that will mean the rebirth of my *own* empire."

His somber eyes glowed. "Long ago, I held all Middle Asia in the palm of my hand. My reign was invisible, but deadly. The petty chiefs and rulers of the little kingdoms knew well that unless my orders were obeyed, my emissaries would visit them with death. And they obeyed! But in the last century, the establishment of the Western powers in this part of the world has slowly shriveled my dominance.

"But when Russia falls, when the whole of Middle Asia becomes a lawless chaos once more, then it will be possible for my Assassins to re-establish my sway on a greater scale than ever. Britain and Russia have held the peace here, but with them beaten, the peace dissolves into a seething caldron of warring tribes and races which I shall soon dominate. *That* is why your supply-line must be destroyed!"

Stanton felt stunned. The vast, sinister plan was so perfectly possible of execution.

If Britain and Russia and their allies lost their grip on the Middle East, the whole region would become a vacuum into which would rush the winds of chaos. And the one purposeful, centralized power in the region would be these dreaded Assassins—

"Allah, he can do it," muttered Fizar Khan thickly. "He has the cunning of a thousand years."

Stanton shook off the crushing apprehension. "What is all this but windy talk by a crazed old man huddling in a crumbling pile of stone in the mountains?" he spat.

HASAN SABAH'S luminous eyes narrowed slightly. "You deem me crazed because I speak of having lived for all these centuries?"

"You've lived no more than sixty years, judging from your appearance," Stanton answered harshly.

To his amazement, the old man nodded. "Yes, it is true that this body of mine is some sixty years old. But this is not the *only* body I have had, American. My mind has inhabited many bodies, in the past centuries—one after another."

There was something so hideous in the calm assertion, that Stanton felt a chill not of the shadowy room.

"Can the mind leave the body?" he scoffed. "Can it pass from one body to another, like a tenant to a new house?"

"It can, with certain aid," Hasan Sabah said calmly. "Your Western science has not delved far into the science of the mind. Only for the last few decades have you had such a science at all. But we in the East have studied it for thousands of years, to the exclusion of all other sciences."

A secret smile dawned in Hasan's hooded eyes, and played around the corners of his withered lips.

"You shall learn much more of these things in a few moments. But first, it is necessary that your companion should become one of my loyal servants."

Fizar Khan shrank back, his face ghastly at these words. But the Assassin guards behind them had gripped them both.

Hasan made a gesture with his claw-like hand, as he rose to his feet. Instantly, at the old man's command, two Assassins went into a recess of the shadowy hall and pushed out from it a big, curious object.

It was a wheel of silver, mounted vertically upon an upright frame of the same metal. The wheel was like a flat disc seven feet in diameter, and upon its face was a pattern of inset, glittering diamonds.

Mark Stanton gasped. The blazing diamonds of that pattern were incalculable in value. But that was not the greatest wonder. It was the pattern itself—a strange design of interlacing loops and spirals which seemed the product of some crazy, unearthly geometry.

His eyes could not seem to follow the

interlacing complexities of those jeweled curves. Staring, he felt his senses reeling from the effort, as though he were falling into an abyss.

With an effort, Stanton tore his gaze from the hypnotic thing. And he heard the shrill, amused laugh of Hasan Sabah.

"You cannot look at the Wheel of Power?" mocked the aged Master of the Assassins. "Perhaps now you begin to believe that there are sciences of the mind which your Western peoples have not dreamed of?"

Stanton was shaken. If Hasan Sabah *was* the master of a psychic science unknown to the outer world—

Fizar Khan was being dragged toward the looming wheel. The Persian was thrust into a chair facing the jeweled disk, and his head was tied stiffly back so that his dilated eyes must stare straight at the wheel.

"Stanton, they seek to steal my mind!" wailed the terrified man. "They will make me one of them—"

"Don't let them fool you, Fizar!" Stanton shouted. "This is all just flummery designed to influence you by power of suggestion. Don't give in to it."

FIZAR did not seem to hear him. The jeweled wheel had begun to revolve, and the Persian was staring at it like a fascinated rabbit.

Stanton had been pulled back a little by his guards. He could not see the face of the wheel. But he could see the awful change that came over the Persian's face.

Fizar's olive countenance became rapt, strange, his eyes seeming to bulge from his head as he stared fixedly at the spinning wheel. Into his eyes came slowly that hollow, glazed look of the Assassins.

Hasan Sabah, watching from his chair like a wizened spider, spoke softly to the Persian.

"I am the Master," said Hasan. "I am Malik Taus, the lord of heaven and hell."

"You are the lord of heaven and hell," answered Fizar tonelessly.

"Heaven lies in the valley here," Hasan continued, and Stanton saw the eagerness that leaped into the Persian's hollow eyes. "And heaven and all its joys of wine and woman shall be yours, so long as you obey me."

"I will obey!" cried Fizar, with that stiff, dreadful eagerness.

"Fizar! For God's sake!" yelled Mark Stanton.

THE Persian did not seem to hear him. He never took his gaze from the diamond wheel, which now was ceasing to spin as Hasan Sabah touched some hidden control.

"It is well," Hasan said, as the wheel stopped. "I shall soon have need of you. Now stand back."

Fizar's bonds were untied. The Persian rose from the chair. And he stepped back, with the other Assassins. He did not even look at Stanton.

But Hasan Sabah was looking at Stanton's white face. And there was amusement in the old man's eyes.

"Do you believe now that the mind can be drawn forth from the body?" he asked Stanton mockingly.

Stanton forced denial to his lips. "No, I don't believe it! It's some devil's trick of hypnotism."

"You'll soon learn differently," promised Hasan Sabah. "I am going to draw your mind forth, Stanton. And *I* shall take its place."

The American stared. He husked, "What are you trying to tell me? That you can exchange minds with me — exchange bodies—"

"How else," asked Hasan meaningly, "do you think that I have lived for all these centuries? Aye, that is the means I use. When my body grows old and worn-out, I simply transfer myself from it to another

and stronger, younger body. The mind is a web of immaterial force which can reside in one physical brain as well as in another."

His dark eyes speculatively surveyed Stanton's rigid form. "Yours will last me for many years, I think. And I have a special reason for wanting your body. That is why I sent your friend Bradley, my servant, to kill your friends but to *capture* you and bring you here. You see, Stanton, in your body I can go down there and make quite sure that the Russian supply-route is cut and that my great plans are realized."

Stanton felt as though he were caught in a weird nightmare. This chill, shadowy hall of strutting peacocks and dead-faced men, it must all be as unreal as the statement the other had just made.

An exchange of minds between two bodies? It wasn't possible! All the tenets of known science refused possibility to such a phenomenon. All known science—yet there might be unknown science that could achieve it—

Hasan Sabah was uttering an order to the huge Kurd who was the captain of the guards. "Summon all my servants. They must witness the transformation so that all will henceforth recognize their Master's new body."

A gong clangored, booming out through the castle. Meanwhile, Stanton was being forced down into the chair that faced the diamond wheel.

Into the great hall came streaming the tenants of the valley. The Assassins! Scores of them, crowding silently into the big room.

Fighting-men of a dozen different races of East and West, stalwart, young, fully armed. And girls of half the East, slim and lovely, Chinese maids as yellow as gold, catlike Turkish girls, pale Circassian maidens.

And all of them—dead-alive! All of them moving stiffly and silently as walking corpses, with that same rigidity of face and hollowness of eye that now marked Billy Bradley and Fizar. Assassins—mindless tools of the lord of murder who had made them what they were!

Hasan Sabah's shrill voice rang authoritatively to the silent, dead-faced throng. "This day, my servants, I take for myself a new body. Henceforth I dwell in the body of this man. Hear ye?"

He was pointing to the numb, staring Stanton. And there came from the dead-faced throng a low, mumbled chorus of answer.

"We hear, Master."

"Henceforth," Hasan declared, "you shall obey me as before, but my commands will come from this man's lips, for I shall be he?"

"We will obey, Master," came the slow, heavy response.

"It is well," said Hasan. "Now watch while your Master casts away this outworn body and takes new form and life."

His chair had been brought beside Stanton's so that both faced the cryptic Wheel of Power. The jeweled disk began to spin. Stanton tried not to look at it, but the giant Kurd behind him forced his head back so that his opened eyes must stare at the whirling surface.

THE blazing diamond pattern seemed to uncoil as the wheel spun faster. Stanton again had that sense of reeling into an abyss as the hypnotic twirl of extra-geometrical curves dragged at his brain. He fought wildly against the overpowering sensation.

"Not magic—science!" he thought wildly as he struggled. "The super-advanced psychic science of a forgotten race—"

The mind was a tenuous network of electric force. It could easily be pulled free of its physical body—hypnotism such as that of the spinning wheel could do that.

But if *two* minds were drawn from their bodies at the same time, and if one of them, by powerful will and knowledge, re-entered the body of the *other* when the process was reversed—

"God, it can't happen! It won't!" Stanton thought despairingly, as his consciousness trembled on the brink of darkness.

He knew nothing but a roaring blackness in which the only light was that of the wheel's blazing, whirling curves. Then presently it seemed to him that the whirl of those hypnotic lines was reversed.

Slowly, consciousness began to come back to him. He was aware again of the chair in which he sat.

A great throb of thankfulness shook him. It hadn't happened. He should have known that such an unholy thing could not happen—

A strong, resonant voice spoke beside him. "It is done!"

That voice—Stanton recognized it—it was *his own voice!*

He opened his eyes. And he uttered a strangling cry as he saw the man who had risen to his feet beside him.

That man was—himself! It was Mark Stanton's tall, stalwart young figure that stood, towering over him.

Stanton numbly looked down at his own figure. He knew what he would see. And he saw it.

His hands were the thin, clawlike hands of a very old man. They were shaking as he raised them to his face—a withered, wrinkled face that was not his own.

He cried out—and his voice was a cracked, quavering shrillness.

Hasan Sabah paid no attention. Facing the staring zombie-throng of Assassins, the man in Stanton's body spoke loudly and triumphantly.

"You have seen me take this new body, my servants. Look at me, and know me so that henceforth you may obey the *new* Hasan."

And Stanton dimly heard the throng answer. "We obey, Master!"

IV

THE crowd of Assassins filed out, shuffling back into the valley from which they had come.

Hasan Sabah nodded to his giant zombie-guards. "Yes, you may go also. I need no one to protect me from *that.*"

And he gestured amusedly at Stanton, who still stood tremblingly looking down at his thin, strengthless old body.

Stanton tottered to a nearby hanging shield, peered dazedly at himself in the polished metal surface. And the wizened, withered old face that looked back at him tripped the pent-up horror in his brain.

He turned and launched himself at the tall, khaki-clad figure that had been his own until a few moments before. His hands clutched at Hasan's throat—his own throat.

But his grip was the weak, nerveless grip of an old man. Hasan flung him off and into a chair, as though he had been a child.

"Oh, but it is good to be strong and young again!" exulted the Assassin lord. The tanned face that Stanton could still only think of as his own flared with exultation. "Your body and your identity will serve me well, American."

It brought a deeper horror to Stanton's rocking mind, that reminder. Not only was he hideously trapped in this worn-out husk of a body. Hasan Sabah, in *his* body, in his identity, would be able to go down to the lowlands and effectively sabotage the Russian life-line, and cause that collapse of Allied power in the Middle East on which he would found his empire of murder.

Stanton's thoughts shook to the ghastly possibilities. He must find some way to present that, no matter what happened to

himself. The fate of the most vital of all the war fronts hung upon it. Yet—what could he do, trapped not only in Hasan's stronghold but in Hasan's cast-off body?

Hasan was surveying him relentlessly. "You have one chance to live a little longer," the Assassin chief was saying. "That body you now inhabit will last a few more years—and life is sweet, in any form. I will let you live, as one of my servants, if you help me. You know things that I must know, if I am to play your part."

So that was why Hasan Sabah had kept him here, after making the hideous exchange of bodies? That was why he had dismissed his guards from hearing? The Assassin's plan became clearer to Stanton.

And Stanton's desperate mind perceived, for the first time, a faint, glimmering possibility of thwarting the other's deadly scheme. A madly impossible stratagem, it seemed. Yet if he could do it—

He looked up shakily at the man who had robbed him of his body. "You will let me live?" he quavered. "If I tell you all you want to know?"

Hasan Sabah laughed. "So life *is* still sweet to you? I knew it would be—it always is. Yes, you can live, as one of my Assassins, if you tell me what I ask."

Stanton was wildly calculating. How long had it been since he and Fizar had come up to this lofty citadel? It seemed like eternities, but how long a period had actually passed?

Two hours? Not more than that, surely. But that wasn't enough. His desperate stratagem wouldn't work until at least two more hours had passed, if at all. That meant he must stall, play for time.

"What do you want to know?" he asked shrilly.

Hasan's reply was crisp. "I must know the exact places at which the supply line can be permanently blocked most easily. I must know also the storage places of explosives, the distances, the details of the guard."

Stanton fathomed the other's intentions. Hasan would go down there to the lowlands in *his* body and identity, would be able unchallenged to prepare deadly sabotage, and with the help of his mindless slaves would sever the Russian life-line once and for all. And then—hell would spew over all mid-Asia and the empire of the Assassins would blossom again like a poisonous flower.

Slowly, Stanton quavered forth the information the other demanded. He made Hasan drag each detail out of him by remorseless questions. He was playing for time, watching and waiting. The only hope for his wild scheme was that he could prolong this inquisition.

An hour passed thus, and part of another. It has been nearly four hours since he and Fizar had reached this place. What he was hoping for and praying for should have happened by now. But it hadn't.

Hasan Sabah suddenly detected the quality of strained watching in Stanton's trembling figure. The Master's eyes narrowed.

"So that is why you have been prolonging your answers," he spat. "You've done that deliberately—you're hoping for help to come from outside. Doubtless you left friends to get help, down below."

"No!" denied Stanton quaveringly, in sharp alarm and dismay. "It isn't so—"

Hasan Sabah laughed. "You poor fool! Even if an army came up here, it couldn't help you now. A word to my faithful servants, and anyone who comes up into these peaks will be destroyed."

He turned, raising a little hammer to strike the copper gong that summoned his guards.

Stanton felt ultimate despair. His wild scheme wasn't going to work. The slender possibility he had hoped for was denied him.

He sprang toward Hasan. He'd do his damnedest to kill this devil, anyway. If he could die taking the Assassin with him—

HASAN SABAH whirled, and his powerful grasp checked Stanton's rush. The Assassin shook Stanton's frail, strengthless old body as he might have shaken a doll. He roared with laughter.

"You haven't realized yet that you're only a poor old bag of bones whom a child could overpower," Hasan laughed. "I can snap your neck with my bare hands, and now I've learned all you can tell, I will—"

Hasan stopped suddenly. Over his face —Stanton's own tanned face!—there came a sudden expression as of an agonizing spasm of pain.

He dropped Stanton and staggered back, clutching his heart. He was gasping for breath, his face suddenly livid, his lips turning blue.

"What—what is this?" he choked. "I can't breathe—my heart is bursting—"

Stanton laughed shrilly. "It's *you* who are the fool, Hasan!" he cried. "You wanted my body because you thought I was young and strong. What you didn't know was that my heart has always been bad, and that I have had one attack after another. The doctors told me that the next attack would kill me."

Hasan was gasping, tottering, his eyes wild and his face a ghastly color as he labored for breath.

"No!" he choked. "It can't be so!"

"You're going to die, Hasan!" shrilled Stanton. "You're going to die in my body, now! You didn't know it but you did me a favor when you exchanged our bodies."

The other man's eyes flashed wild rage as he heard, as he saw the bitter mockery on Stanton's face. Fighting against the attack that was overpowering him, Hasan Sabah showed his tremendous will.

"No!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "I won't die in your body, Stanton. I'll change back —there's still time—"

He lurched forward. Stanton made as though to flee, but the hands of the other gripped him. There was not enough strength in Stanton's aged form to resist, as the staggering Hasan slammed his down into one of the chairs before the Wheel of Power.

The diamond-studded wheel began revolving. Hasan, gasping and pale, exerted convulsive strength to hold Stanton's head up to the spinning hypnotic disk.

"You exulted too soon!" he snarled thickly. "Look!"

Stanton made as though to resist, but seemed unable to take his eyes from the swirling, blazing loops and coils of the disk. Again, he had that weird feeling of being drawn out of his physical body into blackness.

HE CAME back to consciousness. He was sitting in the other chair, now—*and he was in his own body again.*

Stanton looked down at himself with throbbing thankfulness. His own stalwart young body! Though his heart was pounding wildly, though his breath came gaspingly and he felt dizzy, he felt prayerful gratitude.

Hasan Sabah was rising from the other chair. Hasan, back in *his* own body, the thin, scrawny body of an old man.

Hasan's eyes flashed triumph at Stanton, staggering there. "Your trick failed!" he shrilled. He turned and struck the copper gong. "You thought I would die in your body, but I didn't—and now *you* are going to die."

"On the contrary, my trick succeeded," Stanton said hoarsely. "There's nothing the matter with my heart. I only said there was, to bluff you into re-exchanging our bodies."

"A lie!" shrilled Hasan Sabah. "I felt it

myself, in your body, a violent heart-attack that almost overpowered me. You're feeling it now."

"It's no heart-attack, though it feels like one," Stanton retorted breathlessly. "It's merely anoxaemia — mountain sickness. The sickness that makes the heart pound almost to bursting, and the breath short and gasping, when a dweller of the lowlands like myself comes suddenly into a high altitude like this.

"I knew mountain-sickness would hit my body before long," Stanton continued swiftly. "It always hits three or hour hours after coming to a high altitude. I could feel the first symptoms more than an hour ago. And when it hit my body—*your* body, then—I told you it was a heart-attack and you believed it."

Hasan Sabah's wrinkled old face was livid. "You lying dog! Your trick will do you no good—I can re-effect the exchange, and still carry out my plan."

The old man whirled around, as his dead-faced Assassin guards came into the hall in answer to the gong.

He pointed his clawlike hand at Stanton. "Seize him!" he raged.

THE zombie-like Assassins did not obey. Instead, they turned their dull, hollow eyes toward Stanton.

"You summoned us, Master?" the big Kurd captain asked Stanton.

For the first time, in his rage, Hasan Sabah realized that his Assassins did not know of the re-exchange of bodies. To them, Stanton was still the Master.

"You fools, *I* am the Master!" shrilled Hasan, fear coming into his eyes. "I am Hasan Sabah!"

Then, as the dead-faced men paid him no attention, he snatched a pistol from a hidden recess and leveled it at Stanton.

Stanton had no weapon. He met that deadly, sudden attack in the only way he could.

He shouted to the guards, "Kill that man!"

And he pointed toward Hasan Sabah.

The huge Kurd leaped forward. His saber whistled in the air. The point ripped into Hasan Sabah's back and out of his breast. And the skinny, withered little old figure dropped the gun and staggered and fell sidewise.

Stanton found himself shaking violently. Hasan Sabah, the Master of the Assassins who had lived almost a thousand years, was dead.

The giant Kurd and the other Assassins looked up with their hollow eyes at Stanton.

"Now what, Master?" mumbled the man.

"Send me those called Bradley and Fizar Khan," Stanton ordered.

IT WAS not long before the guards came back with Billy Bradley and Fizar. The two men, hollow-eyed zombies like the others, stared up at Stanton without any recognition in their dead gaze.

"Fizar! Billy!" cried Stanton. "You've got to wake up!"

There was no response in their stiff, wax-like faces. Bradley spoke in reply.

"We are awake, Master," he said hollowly.

Stanton felt momentary despair. But then hope came back to him. Billy Bradley and Fizar had been reduced to this mindless state by hypnotic science. The hypnotic and psychiatric science of modern psychologists should be able to bring them back to normal.

And if that was so, these others could be brought back to normal also. All these Assassins, these pitiful men and women of the living dead, could live again, in time.

He gave his orders. "Open the castle gates, and bring horses. Summon every Assassin in the valley. We are going down to the lowlands, to the camp there."

The huge Kurd asked, "Do we go to kill, Master?"

"No," Stanton replied. "We do not go to kill, this time. Leave all your weapons behind."

While the silent Assassins were gathering outside the castle, Stanton explored its chambers. He found, as he had expected, an arsenal of weapons and munitions.

Twenty minutes later, he hurried out into the bright sunrise to the band of waiting Assassins. All of them, men and women, sat their horses in dead-faced silence.

Stanton mounted and gave his command. "We ride. You will follow me."

Back came a dull, mumbling response from many throats. "We follow, Master."

They galloped down the narrow chasm, the weird troop riding silently behind the American. Before they had gone far, there was a booming crash from behind them.

None of the dead-eyed riders looked back, at that prolonged roar. They rode stiffly on. But Stanton looked back.

And he saw the ruins of Hasan Sabah's castle collapsing across the mouth of the blind valley. The fuse he had set in the munitions had done its work. The Valley of the Assassins was closed forever, and after a thousand years, Hasan Sabah lay entombed in the ruins of fabled Alamut.

Stanton turned and rode on. Bradley and Fizar and the others would soon be normal men again, God willing. The threat to the life-line of the democracies was gone. He felt a profound thankfulness.

And the rising sun looked down as for the last time the Assassins rode down out of the mountains behind their Master.

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Death Went That Way

The way is a road . . . leading to a macabre rendezvous planned by a dead man!

THE road unfolded ahead of me, smoothly and quietly. There wasn't much traffic. I glanced down at the road map on the seat at my side. I was getting into western Pennsylvania. I wiggled my foot a bit on the accelerator to ease the stiffness that sets in after hundreds of miles of driving.

By ALLISON V. HARDING

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV.

I felt happy that early summer afternoon. For here I was, no longer Johnny Abbott, unemployed . . . but, thank the Lord, Johnny Abbott with a job and a few dollars in his pocket. And I was headed out for the land of plenty. Out in California a repairman with not too much experience was appreciated. Back in the East . . . nuts!

I had answered one of those ads: "Reliable parties wanted to drive cars to Coast."

I took a chance. I went over to used car lot on Eleventh Avenue and talked to the man. I said I wanted to get to California. That I had driven for years. I showed them my license, birth certificate, and letters of recommendation (they hadn't done me any good elsewhere).

I was okayed. My job was a 1940 cream-colored coupe. It was a repaint job. I wasn't crazy about her. She looked as though she'd been smashed up and then patched together again and painted over. A casual look at the motor showed me the engine had once been supercharged and had had various gadgets on it. The guy who'd owned it probably was a speed fiend. And my hunch was he'd gotten into trouble —for if ever I saw a patched-up job, this was it. To an auto repairman a bad auto accident leaves evidence on a car that can't be patched up or painted over.

But I wasn't the guy to ask questions. I wanted to get West too darn much to care even if I had to go by dog cart.

It was early this morning then that I showed up, got a gas certificate, and a few bucks, and got into my car. The agent stood on the running board, handed me the papers I would need to complete the transaction out on the Coast. Just as I was about to shove off he said: "Well, I hope you make it this time. I hope you get all the way out there this time." I grinned without thinking and said sure I was as good as there.

I WAS hitting along on Route 30 into Pittsburgh when I first noticed it. By "it" I mean that the old bus began to wiggle a bit. You know how on a windy day you get a side pull and push when you're going along at a good clip? Well, this was just like that . . . only there wasn't any wind.

Another thing happened not long after I noticed the wheel tug. First I thought it was the wind too. A whistling. That's what it was, a whistling. And even as I rolled up all the windows and checked the hood catch, I began to make out a thin melody. The tune faintly whistled was "East Side, West Side." I tried to laugh it off. For a car that didn't have a radio, the crate was mighty musical. Oh, well, some trick wind pull on the underside of the car, I reasoned. That was all there was to it.

I gripped the wheel with both hands, counteracting the occasional tugs on the wheel I could feel. But I couldn't rid myself of the strange sensation . . . as though somebody were trying to pull the car off the road . . . or in another direction. And through it all was that damn thin whistle, "East Side, West Side, All Around the Town. . . ."

Then I thought something in the steering wheel might be loose but she responded to the wheel perfectly okay. Oh, well. Then I remembered the first gas station I'd hit earlier in the day. All the Acme Agency cars must follow the same route out to the Coast. From a look-see at the map I gathered that the main idea was to avoid all suggestion of toll charges (witness my being forced to take 30 to Pittsburgh instead of the Penn trunpike). Well, I hit the first prescribed filling station back near York. I guess the boys in these stations get pretty used to seeing the Acme cars going to the Coast. But when I pulled in, two of them looked at me as though I were nuts. Then they sidled over and said:

"So they're still trying to get this old bus out, huh?"

I found out my "bus" had headed for the Coast before. I wondered vaguely why and how the car had got back to the East only for somebody else to have to take it out again. But that was no concern of mine. I was the lucky one for having this opportunity. If it hadn't been for this, I'd still be filling out application blanks in the East.

"What's the joke?" I grinned at the two attendants.

But they shut up then and it wasn't until I was oil and water-checked and fourteen gallons to the good that one of them in checking the company list and taking the serial number from my charge card said to me, "You mean they didn't tell you about this boat, brother?"

"Tell me what? I don't get it."

He leaned confidentially on the running board. "This car just don't like the West, Mister. Nobody can ever get her out. She's a crank, that's sure."

I laughed then and said I was a repairman and guessed I could handle whatever came up.

"Well, Mister," he concluded, "maybe this calls for a particular kind of repairing that you can't do. I tell you that car's kinda haunted."

I drove off. Of course it was some kind of joke I didn't get. Apparently the car had been sent out before and had developed some sort of trouble.

So what. Maybe the boat was a freak. Every so often you hit what they call a "dog" in the automobile trade, a car that is a bad performer. You can't help it. Maybe the old bus was suffering from a weak constitution. I'd keep 'er rolling. Once out to the Coast let her fall apart!

NEARING Pittsburgh I made a right turn and headed up toward New Castle, crossing the Alleghany. The coupe was behaving all right now and I began to think the whole business was my imagination. An hour or so more and I pulled into another indicated stop on my map.

The young fellow who served me at this station didn't seem to recognize the car. For some strange reason I was glad. But then, just as I was checking my air the manager came out of his little central building and came toward me.

"Say-y-y, I thought Acme had given up trying to get that wagon out to the Coast. Have you had any trouble yet?"

I guess I got sort of mad then. I demanded to know what all this business was about. I'd come several hundred miles and I was still in the driver's seat and the bus was pointed straight at the Pacific Coast. So what?

"So nothing," said the manager taken aback at my yelling at him.

"It's nothing to me," he continued. "It's just that that buggy is a bad luck car, seems. You'll run into trouble somewhere and then we'll tow the car back and Acme will start out all over again to shoot 'er West."

"It's not my headache," the manager concluded walking away, "you look tough enough to take care of yourself. Good luck."

I headed below Youngstown into Ohio. It was getting late and I thumbed up the fender lights. We were encouraged to get out to the Coast as fast as we could without breaking any laws—but sleeping every night isn't a necessity and I was in need of the extra bonus that I'd get if I made the trip in the shortest possible time.

So I thought I'd pick up an extra bit of mileage and keep going all night or at least until I felt so sleepy that I had to quit. Then I could just pull up in some little Ohio lane and doze.

This was all new country for me and I was interested in it. As the darkness drew

on, I snapped on the headlights. My coupe bounced on into the night.

"Hmmm," I growled out loud to myself. "Those guys trying to scare me with some crazy jinx story. You're all right, old girl," and I gave the horn button an affectionate pat.

I tripped the accelerator a bit more and the little car bounded forward eagerly into the misty dark. Why, this little buggy couldn't wait to swim in the Pacific! I grinned at the thought and pounded on.

Then ahead I saw the dim lights of one of those all-night stations, few and far between in these days. I coasted onto the concrete drive and pulled up next to the little house.

An old codger came out smoking his pipe.

"Help you, Mister?"

"Yeah, I'd like some gas . . . and I want to take it easy for a few minutes if you don't mind."

"Sure, young feller. I'm glad to have someone to talk to. It gets kinda lonely for an old man out here. Come fur?" he added.

"From New York. I'm headed West. You know, agency cars going out to the war workers."

The old man bent inside the hood of my car. "Water and oil are okay. So you're heading West, huh? Well, they say that's where the money is. Things are pretty slow around here all right. Mighty slow."

I was stretching my legs a bit as I circled around the car.

IN THE dimness of the yellow station lights there was something ominous about the old boat. She stood there, her cream sides barely reflecting the dull light, her nickel sparkling feebly, her radiator headed into the night . . . and looking as though she wanted to get back into the darkness.

"How many did you say?"

"Fill 'er up," I said.

The old man laboriously rang the gas registering indicator back to zero, took the hose and started the pump.

I reviewed the stories I'd heard about my auto.

And it all seemed so silly to me. A haunted car! It was crazy! Why it's okay to have a haunted house but a car . . . nuts. Those stories had me on edge!

"There you are, young feller."

I followed the old man into his office, gave him my credentials and Acme gas credit card. I settled myself in the little office with the attendant.

The old man repeated that he liked to have somebody to talk to on these lonely all-night tricks.

I could see he was anxious to keep me there because after taking a few bottles of pop from the cooler, which he insisted on paying for, I said well, I thought I'd better be getting along.

"Now, Son, there's still a long night ahead of us. Just take it easy a bit longer and keep me company for a while."

I said well, I could take a bit more time off. And anyway, I said, my bus didn't seem to like the idea of going West, jokingly.

"Reminds me of something that happened around here a couple of years ago," he reminisced. He puffed on his pipe and settled himself more comfortably. I thought to myself, I guess I'm in for it now. But his first words got my attention.

"You never head of a haunted car, eh?"

I shook my head silently with a small core of uneasiness in my heart.

"You know, I'm a deputy sheriff around these parts," he pulled back his vest and showed a large star.

"Mebbe you remember about two years ago when that there masked raider was pulling a lot of bank robberies around out here in the Middle West. Well, he pulled

one across the border in Ohio and we heard he was acomin' this way. 'Course you weren't in these parts, but it seemed that this guy, Red Thompson they called him, had only two things in the world that he care about.

"One was his car which he used on all his escapades and the other was a sweety he had back East. Every time he pulled a job—and he was a lone wolf always—he'd circle toward the East. We never caught him. He had a dozen different sets of license plates and he'd even repainted his car. Well, this time he came over the border and headed through here.

"State cops were after him, but Thompson had a sup-upped job and he was a devil driver. It was mighty hard to get within rifle, much less pistol shot of him. Well, sir, while some of the boys were chasing him over the border, one of the State men phoned ahead and we got out on Belvedere Ridge and threw up a barricade as fast as we could.

"We knew Red would have to pick the Belvedere Road, cutting across down into Pennsylvania or take the State Turnpike and we didn't think he'd take a chance on that. Too many State patrols, and once you get on there, it's hard to get off except at certain easy-blocked places."

THE old man paused, lit his pipe and leaned back reminiscently. I was interested in the story in spite of myself. Why, Belvedere Ridge was only a hundred or so miles from where we were, I remembered from my map.

"Go on," I encouraged.

"We were out there on the Ridge, 'bout seven or eight of us. A couple of the boys were armed with .22's and somebody else had a shotgun. I had a .38 service revolver, not much of a bargain on a moving car. Then several of the boys had clubs, and one guy, a linesman fellow I never liked too much had a jack handle.

"We built a log barricade across the road at the peak of the Ridge. We built it on one side to the cliff, and on the other right out to the edge of the road. The road ran between the cliff on one side and then the land dropped off on the other side. There was a sheer drop of a couple of hundred feet into a rock-bound valley.

"We waited, and waited. And then in the distance we heard something coming. It was a car all right. We scattered off the road and clambered up the cliff to the right. All but a sour-dispositioned guy, McGuire, his name was. He got down a few feet at the side overlooking the valley. We hefted our weapons and got set.

"Up the road out of the distance roared Thompson. We knew it was the critter because nobody else would be traveling so fast on that devil's road. The road broke and turned back on itself and Thompson wouldn't get much of a look at the reception we'd built up for him until he was right on top of it. That was what we wanted anyhow. We hoped he'd snarl himself up on the barricade.

"Thompson slammed his way into view; boy, I wanta tell you he had his old bus humming. But he spotted the logs across the road and twisted the wheel. We started to shoot then but the racing, twisting car wasn't much of a target. We pumped some light caliber bullets into the car.

"I'm sure of this because the glass frosted up on the side of the auto. But, By Gum, if the crazy guy didn't think he could go around the barricade . . . and off the side of the road he went, his car tottering on the brink of the sheer drop into the valley. I think he would've made it, too. We were up on the cliff, on the other side of the road from him, amazed and pumping away. I'd used up the five shells in the revolver and was pawing for some more cartridges. But it looked as though before we could do anything about it, he'd

be past the barricade and back on the road t'other side."

"Then McGuire entered the picture. He was perched low on the far side of the road, hanging on with one hand and brandishing the heavy jack handle with the other. I was scared to death Thompson was going to run him down.

"Then McGuire raised up full height . . . and hurled the jack wrench squarely at the windshield of the oncoming car. Boy, I want to tell you it went through the windshield with a crash, right at Thompson. We had a plain shot of this.

"Yes, sir, I can see it now. Red threw up his hands to protect himself from the smashed windshield and the jack . . . and as he did the car bucked out of control off the side of the ridge into the valley below. There weren't nothing else to do but collect the pieces. The old bus turned over a couple of times on the way down, but she wasn't too badly smashed. Thompson was done for though. And he'd 'a been as clean away as a hare if McGuire hadn't stood up and heaved that jack handle."

The old man shook his head, "Plenty of guts, I guess, but McGuire was nasty. I 'member he was arguing about the reward all the time we was pulling what was left of Thompson out of the smash-up below. Even with a bandit it seemed disrespectful and ya can bet Thompson woulda done something about it . . . if he'd been alive!

"I recollect there was one funny thing about the affair. As we climbed up the cliff from the wreck, we thought we heard a whistling. Now I'm not a superstitious man, but so help me, it was a tune that Thompson was always supposed to whistle."

"Thompson was dead, all right?" I said, half-smiling.

"Sure he was dead. We must've imagined the whistling. Those hills out there are kinda funny anyway, with the wind blowing and all. Still it was funny." The old man looked up at the ceiling meditatively.

"Just as clear the tune was, I remember. . . ." He pursed his lips and began to whistle slowly.

I sat bolt upright. "What's that, what's the name of that."

He stopped his whistling and hummed, "East Side, West Side."

WELL, I guess I got out of there fast. I got into the coupe and drove off. There was something scary about this. The tugs on the car wheel! The whistling *I* had heard myself! I tightened on the wheel and headed on along the road.

This was silly. A lot of wiseacres kidding me, an old man's story and a whistling noise, probably in my head. Crazy? Why, I was a sucker to fall for this blarney. There's always a lot of quaint people with quaint ideas in these small towns. The whistling I'd heard was the wind. It must have been. I ripped ahead more confidently. It was getting dark, but I figured I'd keep going and try to make as much time as I could. After all, Acme men are supposed to get out to the Coast as fast as they can and don't forget the special bonus for making it in less time than average!

Resolutely I decided to drive all night. I eased down the accelerator a bit further and edged the car up to the limit.

An hour or so passed and I began to nod at the wheel. I don't like the idea of dozing off and cracking into a tree. So I finally picked out a likely spot and pulled up for a bit of sleep. As an afterthought I got the heavy metal spanner out of the tool kit and placed it on the seat beside me. It lay there, a hunk of reassuring metal. I locked the car doors from the inside, rolled the windows up until there was just a crack left on each side for me to get air through but making it impossi-

ble for anybody to reach through and unlock the car doors.

And a couple of minutes later I was asleep. I was that tired. And I dreamed. Lovely dreams. All about driving onto the beach at California and right into the water where I traded my car for a surfboard and bounced over the waves pulled by a motor boat driven by a gorgeous, grinning blonde.

I was jouncing along over the waves having a wonderful time when a particularly big jounce woke me up. And I was moving all right. It took me a second to figure where I was . . . I wasn't in my little Manhattan hall bedroom all right. I was in the car . . . and it was going and . . . I craned my head. . . . *Somebody else was driving!*

"Heh," I let out a startled yell. My stomach did a flop. The guy driving looked dead! I mean just that. He was so white—with a shock of red hair accentuating the whiteness. It was dark and that was what made the pallor so remarkable.

It almost seemed to glow as though the white of his skin came through his rumpled suit.

I'd been pushed over onto the other seat and the spectre was behind the wheel looking straight ahead. I wasn't going to argue with no dead man, believe me. Then it hit me quick who he was! How did I know? Well, he must have been. He had red hair!

WE DROVE along for a while and I didn't know what to do. The guy was ripping but he was a superb driver. On one or two corners I put my hand over on the wheel and brushed against his forearms. They felt like rock steel.

I gave up any idea of wrestling it out with him. Apparition or not, he looked, and felt strong. We were going too fast to jump. So giving up the idea of tussling with this guy, I got into my corner and stayed.

We were in some section of the country I didn't know. Every now and then we'd pass a lonely street light and I'd look at my "dead chauffeur." He was white and where his eyes should have been there were just black circles. On top of the white face his flaming red hair stood out like some ghastly neon sign in the middle of a graveyard at midnight.

I was wondering what would happen when all of a sudden the Thing started to whistle. First it sounded like a steam winch, a hissing and a blowing . . . and then out came the whistle, all hollow "East Side, West Side . . ." then he began to pull the wheel more from side to side. I edged nearer and waited my chance. The ghost began to get excited. For the first time he looked to left and right and then back. He didn't even notice me. For him I wasn't even there. I was closer now. I had started to put out my hand to grab the wheel when the figure of Thompson, for now I was sure of this, began to contort and twist terribly. We were coming rapidly to a bend in the road and involuntarily I yelled:

"Look out," and I made a grab for the wheel.

At that the deathly white figure threw both hands up in front of its face. We were still going at a good clip and I had my hands full grabbing the wheel and pulling the coupe back on the road. For several seconds my attention was riveted on guiding the careening coupe but with car speed once again normal and under control, I chanced a sidelong glance.

Thompson had evaporated, disappeared completely. I slid under the wheel and braked the now slowly moving car to a complete stop. I got out and looked back down the dark road. Nothing to be seen.

Nothing to be heard but the midnight rustling of the breeze along the dark coun-

try lane. My knees and stomach were crawling as I got back into the car.

I couldn't kid myself out of this one. I reasoned impatiently with myself though. Maybe it was an ordinary road bum. After all, it had been pretty dark. I hadn't seen very much.

I inventoried my pockets. Everything was there. Money, credentials, everything. I started the car slowly forward and then I remembered something. I groped along the seat beside me and then on the rubber matting of the floor. The metal spanner was nowhere to be found!

After bolstering up my sagging morale I once again set the car out along the road. 'After all, Thompson's ghost or no Thompson's ghost, I was in this to get to the Coast . . . and nothing else. And I kidded myself, there was surely a reasonable explanation to all of this—there had to be!

The car behaved pretty well for the next few miles. Then, as I was climbing up a long, lonesome hilly road heading for the main highway and the State Turnpike again, I heard a whistling. The same whistling, same tune!

I tried for a second or two to ignore the baleful sound. But it dug and rasped into my very soul. I shuddered. There was something gleefully ominous about it. But I was still driving determinedly hard when ahead I saw the sign. It leered out at me.

It read: "Belvedere Ridge 1½ miles."

THE tempo of the whistling increased like a macabre accompaniment to my spinning wheels as I shot by the sign and on up the slope that led inexorably to that fated ridge a mile and a half further on. Then suddenly I came to a compulsive decision. I could not go further!

It took an effort physically and mentally. The car was running, racing almost by itself now. But I steadied my hold on the wheel and with an effort lifted my weight off the accelerator. I slumped in the driver's seat as the coupe slowed. My foot fumbled for the brake and I ground the car down to a stop, my hands wet with sweat on the wheel. California nothing! Not in this crate!

Before I could change my mind I quickly backed the car around and headed it in the other direction.

The whistling stopped now! I was headed East!

I didn't care about the Coast one bit now. I just wanted to get the old bus back to Acme in New York. I roared. But never once did the auto falter. She behaved beautifully. No tugging at the wheel. No more whistling. By the time I hit the Holland Tunnel I was beginning to feel just a bit silly. But it was too late then. A few more minutes and I was at the Acme lot.

"I got sick," I said. "I couldn't make it. I'm sorry."

My misgivings and suspicions about the car came back a bit then. The manager was strangely silent. He nodded and accepted my explanation of illness. "Sure," he said. Sometimes I could come around again and they'd give me another car. So we parted the best of friends and the only dirty looks were directed at the car.

You'll think I'm crazy maybe, but by golly I think the old crate looked positively happy standing there back in the Eastern lot. Under the warm sun, as I walked away with a backward glance, the old bus looked serene. The last two days seemed far away and preposterous.

But I knew I hadn't dreamed any of it, try as I might to kid myself into this belief. And somehow I was firmly convinced that that old bus never would go West.

A month passed before I got up enough courage to go back to the Acme lot to ask for another car. I'd still been unsuccessful in landing an Eastern job. As I

neared the Acme lot I found myself looking for the cream-colored automobile. It was nowhere to be seen. I went over to the shack and buttonholed the manager.

"'Member me," I said, "I started out with one of your cars four weeks ago . . . got sick. I wondered if you'd have another buggy for me. I still want to make California."

I thought maybe the man wouldn't recognize me. But he did.

He said: "Oh, hello Mister. Yeah, I guess we can fix you with another automobile."

And he turned away and looked out over the lot. He scratched his head and then pointed to a sleek, new job in the corner. "I guess that'll be the best bet." He told me to show up three days later.

I was about to leave when my curiosity about the old car got the best of me.

"Say, Chief," I said, "what happened to the other car, you know, the cream-colored one? Did you get somebody else to get it out . . . ?"

THE manager turned toward me and grimaced. "Yeah, we got somebody. But he didn't get no further than you did. And he didn't come back. He smashed up. All we got left is the pile of junk they're shipping back to us."

I gaped.

The manager fished around in the pocket of his dirty windbreaker.

"Here," he said. "Take a look at this." And he reached out an old newspaper clipping toward me.

I read:

New Castle, Pa., August 21.—A fatal accident occurred not far from this place yesterday when a car driven by T. H. McGuire plunged off the road at Belvedere Ridge and crashed sixty-five feet into a ravine. McGuire was instantly killed.

Police were puzzled when investigation showed that the steering mechanism had been jammed with a jack handle.

The accident occurred at the same spot where two years ago vigilantes ran Red Thompson, notorious bank robber, off the road, causing his car to crash into the valley below and killing him. McGuire was driving the car West for an agency shipping autos to the Pacific Coast.

Coincidence? Perhaps you'll say McGuire is a common name. How do I know it was the same McGuire? The answer to that is, I don't know.

And believe me, Brother, I don't want to know!

NEW SUCCESS OVER ATHLETE'S FOOT

NEW SCIENTIFIC 2-WAY TREATMENT WITH **QUINSANA** POWDER —ON FEET AND IN SHOES — IS PRODUCING AMAZING RESULTS. IN TESTS ON THOUSANDS OF PERSONS, PRACTICALLY ALL CASES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT CLEARED UP IN A SHORT TIME.

They just weren't the sort of people you'd invite to a respectable dinner party—even if they'd been alive!

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

Speed the Parting Ghost

By HELEN W. KASSON

WHEN Mother screamed I was sitting before the fire thinking how nice it was to sit before the fire. Besides that I was waiting for Betty. Mother was giving a dinner to celebrate my engagement to Betty and tonight was the night.

Mother had fussed a lot with this dinner on account of Mrs. Vandergood, Betty's mother. Betty is fine: a lady, but not too much of a lady when it isn't politic to be too much of a lady. But her mother! Well, I'm doomed to be her son-in-law so I guess I ought to be glad that she's a step, as the saying goes, above me. Frankly, I'm content to let her stay on that top step without intruding. She's very society and stern, with a rock-ribbed forehead and a neck like a ship's mast. And she drinks tea as if she liked it. When Mother and I drink tea we look around for a chaser.

Mother and I are plain folks. Plain to some anyway: fancy to others. It depends on how you live. Mother has had three husbands, all dead now. But don't get the idea that is anything more than coincidence. There was never a question about the death of any one of them except perhaps the first, my father. And that was silly. He died simply and honorably from falling backwards down the cellar stairs while he was yelling at Mother. She didn't even give him a little push. But you know how suspicious the police are, especially of the beneficiary of the deceased's insurance. So when someone gets three batches of husbands' insurance you can be sure everything is open and aboveboard. Anyway, that's what Mother said.

So we were having this dinner to celebrate my engagement to Betty and I was thinking how nice it was to have money enough to do the thing up brown, thanks to the kind offices of my three fathers in dying, when Mother screamed.

Betty and Mrs. Vandergood were due any minute. Mother had gone in to take a last look at the table, to see whether the silver gleamed and the damask shone enough to knock Mrs. Vandergood for a loop, and to check on whether cook or the butler had been at the sherry yet, when, as I said before, she screamed.

"Alan," she yelled. "ALAN!"

I rushed valiantly to her rescue. I leaped from my chair and made the dining room in two jumps and a slide. I almost slid back when I reached the door and looked in.

The table, which had been spruce and shiny and neat before, was a shambles. The salted nuts were demolished; the olives were hacked and torn; pickles were rolling over the carpet and some of them squooshed under my feet as I entered. There were pools of liquor in the plates. The candles were burning crookedly and dripping grease in big green gobs onto the tablecloth. But worst were the two characters leaning elbow to chin on the table and yelling at Mother. They were the two most disreputable characters I have ever seen. No, not the *most* disreputable, for I had seen these two characters when they were alive—and alive or dead there wasn't a hair's difference in the degree of their disreputability.

They were my defunct Uncle Salty and Aunt Olive, Mother's brother and sister, respectively, who had been suffocated by smoke in a prison fire two years ago. I knew because I had seen and identified the bodies.

Mother was crying and screaming and switching her eyes from Aunt Olive's stringy red hair and hawklike face to Uncle Salty's filthy beard which he was combing nervously with the hook he wore instead of a right hand. Once he'd been a seaman and he'd lost that hand to a shark many years before he died.

"Shhhh, Mame," he was shouting. "SHUSH!"

"Mattie, to you!" Mother screamed.

Yes, they were dead—both of them. I'd always thought ghosts were all gassy ectoplasm and fog, but these creatures looked to be constructed as solidly as a barn door. True, their eyes were a bit cavernous and their skin was a cadaverous green, but they were *there* materially. If you put out your hand you could feel them—*if* you wanted to, which I didn't.

THERE was too much of a racket at the moment for much more to be clear. Mother was yelling soprano and Aunt Olive was yelling whiskey contralto and Uncle Salty was booming basso profundo. So, just to round out the quartette I wheezed in with a gaspy tenor. I was seeing not only red but fireworks as I looked around at the mess they had made of the dinner table.

Things didn't quiet down much until after cook and the butler quit. They came in to see why the house was shaking, took one long look at Aunt Olive who was drowning hair and all in the sherry, one short look at Uncle Salty who had gotten his hook entangled in the Philadelphia glass chandelier and was swinging at it with his left as if it were a punching bag, one look of tacit understanding at each other, and their nostrils tightened in unison as if they didn't want to get too much of the bad smell in them. They straightened and the butler said simply and sincerely, Madam, we are leaving.

"Leaving," Mother yelled. "You ingrates!"

"We have our pride, Madam, our reputations, our honor—"

"Keep them," Mother said, "if you haven't lost them up to now."

"You've never had guests up to now," the butler said succinctly.

"But the Vandergoods," Mother began.

Cook leered. "From the looks of these characters I wouldn't care to wait for the rest."

They relieved us of their wages and left. Mother looked helpless and beaten. "Company for dinner," she cried, "and it's Alan's engagement party and there's a turkey in the oven. . . . What'll I do with it?" She all but tore her hair, adding in one last wail as if it were the crowning blow of all, "And the potatoes have to be baked with marshmallows!"

"Aw, quit it, Mame," Salty said. "I remember when you rustled stew for twelve people at the boarding house and thought nothing of it."

Mother turned on him like a raging lioness. Upset by the loss of the domestic staff on which she had leaned in the hope that it would raise our stock in Mrs. Vandergood's estimation, she had almost forgotten the two ghostly roots from which her troubles sprang.

"You get out!" she shrilled. "Both of you. Go to—to—Hell! That's probably where you came from anyway. And *don't* call me Mame."

She stopped suddenly as if, for the first time, she remembered that the souls, if any, of Salty and Olive two years ago had departed this earthly sphere.

"Good Lord," she said weakly, cowering from them, "You're *dead!* How did you get back?"

"Like this," Salty said, fastening his sunken eyes on the swinging door which led to the kitchen.

We gazed, flabbergasted, as it opened for no visible reason. Through it we could see the china cabinets over the sink. They looked real and unspooky until suddenly their doors opened too. A glass rose from the shelf and floated out through the air, through the open door and settled itself on the dining-room table.

Salty lowered his eyes and the kitchen door swung closed. "That's how," he said,

"only vice versa, of course. Instead of bringing things *to* us, we sent ourselves *away* from where we were. It's a sort of mental Jiu Jitsu. It's the art," he recited mechanically, "of so applying the mental forces that the slightest expenditure of force will overcome the greatest possible resistance. I probably shouldn't mention Jiu Jitsu at this crisis in your National affairs, but out there," he waved vaguely, "where we are, everyone is the same. Nobody is anything: Japs, French, Americans, Germans—they're all just people."

"*Dead* people," Mother breathed. "*Why* did you come back?"

I'd never seen Mother so scared before. She was panting and there were beads of perspiration on her forehead. My own hands were pretty clammy, I'll admit.

"Don't you know what night this is?" Olive asked.

Still too frightened to speak, Mother shook her head.

"Well, it's All Saints' Eve," Olive said, "the night set apart for com—commemoration of the faithful departed." She hiccoughed and took another swig of sherry. "We thought you knew. But anyway you did the thing up brown. You did just what you were supposed to: got a lot of swell food and drinks and put as many chairs as there are dead in the family and turned out the lights and waited for us to arrive." She rose, swaying drunkenly, one string of strawy red hair dangling over her nose. "As the faithful departed," she waved her glass, slopping more wine on the tablecloth, "we wanna thank you—"

"Faithful departed!" Mother spat. She was getting more used to the idea of hob nobbing with ghosts, and now that she was sure they meant no harm her anger returned. "Thieves! Scoundrels! Shoplifters! Murderers! Get out!"

"That ain't fair, Mame," Salty said, combing his beard with his hook. "I ain't a murderer. That guy I killed—it was right after I lost me hand." Under stress of emotion Salty had always lapsed into dialect. "He got me mad so I clipped him and me hook caught his neck." He paused for a moment, licking his lips reminiscently. "Right in the juglar, it got him. Gord, what a bloody mess! But, honest, I didn't mean to do it. I forgot about me hand being a hook until it caught and I couldn't get it loose. That ain't murder, it's forgetfulness. Fawncy puttin' a man in the clink for *that!*" He rose to strut about the room in a seedy, desiccated, revolting caricature of an English fop.

"And I'm no thief," Olive put in. "They jugged me on false charges." She rose too, swinging her wine glass in a wide circle. "They murdered me, that's what they did. If I hadn't been in prison when the fire started I wouldn't have been suffocated by smoke and I wouldn't be dead now." Two tears welled from her sunken eyes . "They planted that bracelet on me and murdered me, thas what they did. Murrerrd!"

On the last, frenzied screech Mother edged nearer. "Where did you get your emerald brooch then?" she asked accusingly. "You were a pickpocket and a shoplifter and a thief, and you know it!"

RIGHT here was where I thought I ought to break in. If Mother was going to rake up all of Olive's and Salty's old crimes she wouldn't be through until doomsday. The main thing was to get those —those two *bodies* out, get the table cleaned up and try to serve Mrs. Vandergood and Betty their dinner as best we could.

"Let's let bygones be bygones," I said brightly. "You're here and of course we're glad to see you, but we're having guests for dinner—my fiancee and her mother. We'd like to have things nice for them."

"They're socialites," Mother put in proudly.

"Really?" For the first time a gleam of

life shone in Aunt Olive's cavernous eye. "Rich, eh? Do they wear lots of jewels?" One of her clawlike hands clutched convulsively.

I seized Mother's dress as she sprang. "Control yourself," I hissed. "We've got to get them out. Let me handle it." I turned to Salty with a smile so toothy and ingratiating and artificial that I know I must have looked nauseating.

"I suppose you're tired after your long—er—journey. Wouldn't you like to go into the bedroom and rest for awhile?"

My defunct uncle leered. "No, thanks. We've only got until midnight here and we're not wasting any time in sleeping. We get plenty of that where we came from. I'm disappointed in you, trying to get rid of me that way. After all I did for you too. Leaving you that money in my will, and my binoculars and—and—that due bill at the hotel."

"That money," I said thickly, "was in your will, but no place else. The prison authorities said you didn't have a dime to bury you. And the binoculars had one lens cracked, and when I tried to live out your due bill at the hotel so many creditors haunted—er—dunned me and so many obscene characters tried to put the bite on me that I was forced to move."

Salty's face fell. "Well anyway," he said softly, "I *did* leave you all my clothes, didn't I? I mean, after I had my accident and had no use for them."

"You mean after you were jugged," Olive said.

"That striped tie," Salty said reminiscently. "I always did like that striped tie. What ever did you do with it, Alan?"

"You were buried in it," I snapped.

"Was I? By George!" He lifted up his long, ragged beard. The remnants of a decayed, dirty string hung disconsolately around his neck.

This was getting us nowhere. "Look Uncle and Aunt," I said, trying to put a respect I did not feel in my voice, "can't you go around and do your haunting elsewhere—just for tonight? Come back tomorrow. We'll be alone then, just Mother and me, and we'll fix you a feed that will make you die—er—swoon with joy."

Olive waggled her stringy head. "It's no use, dear. We're like Cinderella. We've only 'till twelve, only tonight. Think what it means to us—only one night a year when we can eat and drink. The rest of the time. . . ." Her voice trailed off disconsolately. She roused herself and took another swig of sherry. "I'm sorry to spoil your party—and yours too, Matt. (Not that we ever got along too well—you were always putting on the dog. Not that you had any right to—you did a good bit of thieving too in a high-grade way. You milked your three husbands dry.) Still, I'll tell you what we'll do. As long as Salty and I are responsible for the help leaving we'll volunteer to serve as butler and maid. Only until twelve though—"

"Over my dead body!" Mother screamed. "Maid and butler. Why you—you corpses!"

SALTY wagged his hook in sharp reproof. "Careful, Mame. We're not corpses by choice, you know." He winked slyly at Olive and said, "By the way, we see a lot of your three husbands where we are. There's not one of them's too pleased with you. A word from us and you might be in for some triple haunting. You'd better do as Olive says and let us stay. You know," he crossed one leg and swung it idly, "it was mighty strange the way they all died. Mighty strange. . . ."

"You mean," Mother said hoarsely, "that they've gotten together—they *know* each other?"

Salty nodded. "It's mighty interesting the different ideas each one has about you."

"Lord," Mother groaned. "I promised every one of them I'd never marry again."

"They're mad about that," Olive said succinctly, "all but Jerry. He kind of lords it over the others because he's the last," she paused, "so far."

Mother swallowed hard. I broke in before she got her gorge settled.

"Look," I said, "let's be reasonable." I vacillated between them, wondering which would be more amenable to reason and settled on Salty. To my knowledge he had been jailed only once and, while that once was a life sentence for murder, the murder just *might,* as he claimed, have been an accident. But one doesn't *accidentally* shoplift or pick pockets and Olive had been in and out of so many jails that I had used up the O page in two address books trying to keep track of her. She had had only two passions in life—jewels and chocolate candy. It was a simple equation: her passion for jewels got her in jail; her passion for chocolate candy made the stay there more pleasant. I sent her what I could.

I turned placatingly to Salty. "You two can't serve as butler and maid. You've had no experience. Besides," I added in what was meant to be an offhand manner, "you're dead. Dead people don't go around doubling for domestics. Where are your—your—uniforms?"

"You'd turn people's stomachs with those smoke-drenched shrouds," Mother remarked. Then, with peculiarly feminine curiosity, she asked, "Is that what you wore when you died, Olive?"

Olive rose and began doing a ghastly caricature of a minuet around the table, the rags of her garment fluttering and emitting a faint, mouldy smell as she bobbed and dipped.

"It is," she sang, "and I'll wear it to Alan's engagement dinner. A funeral, a marriage: Life is funny!" She stopped suddenly. "I should have said 'Death is funny,' shouldn't I? Both those things took place after I died. But Death *isn't* funny." Her face hardened into a bleak, desiccated determination. "That's why you've *got* to let us stay, Matt. We'll be dead forever, but we're only alive until twelve tonight. We're *going* to stay whether you want us or not, but if you're nasty about it we'll tell Alan's future mother-in-law and his la-de-da fiancee the way you ham-strung his three fathers. That ought to—"

At that moment the bell rang. It sounded like the crack of doom, Judgment Day, the beginning of the end. It was, in fine, Betty and Mrs. Vandergood. Little imps of thought turned somersaults in my mind. *If we could lock the dining-room door . . . but there was no key. . . . If, in two seconds, we could quietly murder Olive and Salty and dispose of the bodies . . . but Olive and Salty were already dead and trying to dispose of their bodies was just what was causing all the confusion. . . . If we—could pass them off as alive. . . .* That was it! If we could pass them off as alive! It just went to show the degree of madness I had attained. Suddenly it seemed much less unrespectable to have two disreputable characters like Olive and Salty alive than it was to have them dead. There was something so—so low-grade about corpses.

"Never mind going to the door," Olive said, "I'll open it—from here."

"No," I shouted. "*No* mental Jiu Jitsu! Remember, if we let you stay, *carry* things in your hands."

"Go on, Alan," Mother said resignedly, "I'll take care of them. Keep Betty and her mother occupied for awhile."

I reeled to the door and pulled it open just as another raucous blast of the bell tortured my eardrums. Betty stood there looking so petite and beautiful and completely normal and alive that I began to believe the specters in the dining room must be the product of my mad brain. What is that school of philosophy which teaches that when you leave a room the furniture and rugs and even the room itself completely disappear—that they are only there because

you are there and when you leave they cease to exist? Well, anyway, I was trying hard to believe in that philosophy, struggling to grasp it as if it were a raft in a bounding ocean.

THEN I saw Mrs. Vandergood. Did I say her neck was like a ship's mast? It wasn't. It was like a staff of molded cement—just as rough and unyielding—and around it was hung the most beautiful string of emeralds I have ever seen. When I looked at Mrs. Vandergood's neck and at those emeralds I knew instinctively that Salty and Olive, alive or dead, wouldn't pass muster.

I gave Betty a good, long kiss. I'd never gone quite that far under the gimlet eyes of her mother before—a peck on the cheek was just about all she'd countenance. But I figured this was the end of everything anyway and I might just as well have something to remember on long winter evenings when I sat before the fire in single blessedness.

"Why, Alan," Betty said. She was pleased, I could tell it. I began to feel like a matador, like a swashbuckling sort of Jesse James. I was pretty proud that I'd been brave enough to defy Mrs. Vandergood's ramroddy ideas about how a gentleman ought to act before he is married.

"Come into the living room," I said. Thank goodness that was in order. Olive and Salty had stuck close to where the food and liquor was. Then, in line with my fatalistic feeling that this was the end and I might as well make it a good one, I added with new bravado, "Have a drink." Mrs. Vandergood didn't approve of hard liquor and I knew it.

I sidled them carefully to the davenport, keeping between them and the dining-room door.

It was pretty quiet in there and I wondered what was happening. Oh, well, maybe Mother had worked something out. After all, Olive and Salty had been her blood kin.

I got Mrs. Vandergood and Betty perched on the davenport before the fire with their backs to the dining room and took a deep breath. Inasmuch as I hadn't expected to defy Mrs. Vandergood's temperance there weren't any cocktails mixed, so I just grabbed a bottle of whiskey from the cabinet and a couple of glasses. They might as well take it straight. They'd probably need more of the same, later.

I didn't wait to be polite but downed a straight shot on the way over. Mrs. V. glared. "No, thanks," she said icily as I dropped the wherewithal before her, "I don't drink. Neither does my daugh—"

But something had gotten into Betty. Maybe it was the way I had kissed her—or maybe I flatter myself. Anyway, she grabbed the bottle neck like a veteran and poured herself a slug. I grinned a little weakly because I still hadn't forgotten about Olive and Salty in the dining room and I was still wondering what Mother was doing about making them and the room presentable. Even the new look in Betty's eyes, which made me tingle and feel swashbuckling again and very virile, didn't banish my certainty that once she saw my dead relatives I'd be half of a broken engagement. Betty was a good sport and I believed she loved me, but it would take a lot more than good sportsmanship and just plain *human* love to overlook those two characters from the great beyond. To forgive them, one would have to be almost Godly.

Betty smiled at me just then and I was certain she *was* Godly. Angelic anyway.

"Well, here's to the future," she said, and downed the drink.

I downed another. I knew I had no future.

Suddenly remembering my duties as host, I got the mad idea of bringing Betty's mother into the conversation. I

turned to her with what was meant to be a smile, but came out all wrong. "What have you been doing lately, Mrs. Vandergood?" I asked.

The ramrod she called her neck rotated vaguely in my direction; her little, black, close-set eyes looked off into space. "How psychic of you to ask, Alan." Her words fell like little granules of ice into the Siberian wastes of my heart. (I was worrying now about the strange silence from the dining room and wondering whether Mother had succeeded in laying the ghosts of Olive and Salty or whether the procedure had been vice versa.)

"I have been occupying my time in a very interesting manner," she continued. "I've been studying steganography."

"Stegan-what?" For a fleeting moment I thought she was referring to those queer little hooks and curves queer little office girls write in queer little notebooks, but then I looked at her neck and I was sure she wasn't.

She waved my bewilderment aside with a scrawny, beringed hand. "Steganography," she said coldly. "It's a way of writing—in cipher. I correspond with the spirits of the departed. They're lovely, just lovely!"

WAIT until she saw Salty and Olive! I wondered whether she had ever corresponded with them in their eternal home, or with any one of my three fathers. I wondered whether she knew about mental Jiu Jitsu. I wondered if she knew how those lovely spirits *looked* when they came back. I gulped and said weakly, "I see. Sort of ghost-writing, eh? I've heard of it."

Her little, thin lips closed in tight disapproval of the joke. Before she could put me in my place, Mother reeled in.

Mother looked pale and a little frowzled, and there was a spot in the folds of her dress, but she was fighting valiantly to hold the shreds of convention about her and act as if nothing had happened. She apologized to Mrs. Vandergood and Betty for not being there to receive them, muttering something vague about servants nowadays. She hoped they'd forgive anything a little out of the ordinary that might happen—this was a new cook and butler and they weren't very good—but would we all please come into the dining room now because dinner was ready.

I gave Betty my arm. I thought I'd better be there for support against her first glimpse of Olive and Salty. I hoped Mrs. Vandergood *would* fall down and pass out. I didn't feel capable of coping with her disillusionment when she saw some *real* spirits. Besides, I was sure my late relatives didn't have a glimmer of knowledge about steganography.

The dining room was empty when we reached it. The tablecloth had been changed and the glasses washed. There weren't any nuts or sherry or pickles on the table—I guess our dear departed had eliminated them all—but a pickle oozed under my foot and soggled into the rug as I entered, gooey reminder that once there had been meant to be a formal dinner party.

We got seated without event. I held my breath as Mother stepped on the electric bell under the table. The kitchen door swung slowly open—via mental Jiu Jitsu, but luckily Betty and Mrs. Vandergood weren't looking that way. I didn't know which I most hoped wouldn't come in first, but it was Salty. Mother had found an old tail coat which had belonged to one of her husbands—the last, I think—and Salty had squeezed his ectoplasmic body into it and was bursting at the seams. It was kind of green and the moths had been at it and either it or Salty gave off a musty odor. He clumped over to the table carrying one of those sandwich plates with a raffia handle hooked over his hook. On the

plate, stretched out like green corpses, lay four (count 'em) four warty-looking pickles.

He plopped the plate on the table and released his hook.

Mrs. Vandergood gasped. Betty's eyes widened for a moment before she dropped them to her plate.

"Pass 'em," Mother hissed.

"Oke, Mame," he said.

Well, at least Mame might pass for Ma'am. I hoped.

He caught the plate on his hook again and, with his left hand, carefully lifted one pickle from the plate and dropped it in front of Mrs. Vandergood. He paused, looked at her leathery neck for a moment, and asked, "Say, you're sure you're not dead too, aren't you?"

"Too," she breathed. "What do you mean, *too?*

"Salty," Mother said commandingly, "please pass the pickles."

He shrugged, walked around to Betty, dropped one pickle on her plate and, in passing, gave her a slight, appreciative nudge. She jumped, looked at me with stark amazement in her eyes and melted back into her chair. What hopes I had left melted too. Salty dropped a pickle at each place and then, swinging the plate over his head and down again like a playful milkmaid, disappeared into the kitchen.

"Odd service," Mrs. Vandergood commented icily.

Mother shrank. Betty looked at me and I could see our marriage soaring on wings into never-never land. Mrs. Vandergood did not deign to eat her pickle. I munched noisily on mine and wished I had had the foresight to bring the bottle of liquor to the table.

MOTHER took a deep breath and stepped on the bell again. The door swung open and Olive entered, wearing a green smock over her carcass which, if possible, made her look even deader than before. She was carrying four plates of soup, one in each hand and one on each wrist in the manner of the best hasheries. How she got them there, I'll never know. "Oh, yes, of course, and let the left wrist one slide. It might have landed upright, but it didn't. I didn't get my napkin there in time either. But then one napkin would never have been enough to sop up all that soup anyway. Even Mrs. Vandergood's dress wasn't enough. The soup dripped off her lap onto the rug.

"Sorry," Olive said. "I'll get you a spoon. Maybe you can catch some."

Mrs. Vandergood rose—majestically, titanically, like avenging death.

"Please," Mother said, dabbing futilely at the soup with a sopping napkin. "Please, Mrs. Vandergood, I promise it won't happen again."

"Again!" Mrs. Vandergood screamed, for once forgetting her cushioned voice. "It shouldn't happen once. To a dog! My daughter shall never marry into *this* family!" With that she collapsed on the chair, fumbled at the neck of her dress and produced a handkerchief which she waved weakly before her face.

"Mother," Betty said quietly, "it wasn't their fault. It's the servant problem. Everyone has trouble nawadays."

My Mother caught on quick as a whip. "It's the administration. Just let the Republicans get in and you'll see a change."

That was the right approach. Mrs. Vandergood's face hardened and you could just see hate of the administration doing it. Betty subsided in her chair, just the faintest crinkle of a smile at the corners of her eyes. At that moment, I *really* loved her.

Olive took off the soup plates and brought in the turkey without very much happening except that she stacked the soup plates while they were full and they dripped all the way out to the kitchen and a strand of her red hair kept tickling the

turkey all the way in. She put the turkey down and after awhile weaved her way back to the kitchen. Salty's voice boomed out in a pirate song as the door swung open.

I looked at Mrs. Vandergood to see how angry she was now. She was plenty angry, so I dropped my eyes to her neck. Her neck had always intrigued me. I had never seen a neck quite like it—not that I ever wanted to—but now somehow it looked strange, different—sort of naked and indecent.

Suddenly I realized what was wrong. The emeralds were missing. Subconsciously, from the moment Mrs. V. entered, I had known those emeralds were going to prove too much of a temptation for Olive, though what good they would do Olive in her present state of decomposition—what good they would do her where she was going when the clock struck twelve, I couldn't figure. I suppose I knew the joy of the chase, the feeling of a thing well done, the satisfaction of accomplishment would outweigh utilitarian reasons with Olive.

I stretched my foot over, colliding with Mother's on the way, and pressed the electric bell on the floor. Hard. And twice.

AS BEFORE the door swung open without any visible physical presence to activate it, and stood swaying on its hinges a full ten seconds before anyone appeared. This time, however, both Betty and Mrs. Vandergood were watching. They had seen me press the bell and were curiously awaiting developments. When they saw the door, hanging as it were on a thread of thought, they gasped stutters of gasps, a sort of Morse Code of breathing.

"We've an electric eye on that door," I said.

Everybody looked relieved.

Then, *both* Olive and Salty entered.

"Olive," I said, fastening my eye on her with gimlet intensity, "put back the—er—ice. Immediately!"

Everyone, including Mother, stared. We had no water, let alone any ice.

Olive shrugged, sauntered over to Mrs. Vandergood and leaned over her carelessly. Now, I thought angrily, is when she *should* use mental Jiu Jitsu. However, the result was the same. Mrs. Vandergood gave a slight start, a shiver, and reached down the front of her dress with a convulsive gesture. A moment later her hand emerged into the open with the emerald necklace.

"Heavens," she said, "the clasp must have broken."

Salty tittered. Mother's face got dangerously red, Betty looked confused and I tried to control a grin at the corner of my mouth. Olive, however, was staring intently at Mrs. Vandergood. Finally, she walked around the table to get a better view.

Mrs. Vandergood muttered, "Well, really," and started to rise, when suddenly Olive shouted, "I've got it now. Pearl!"

Mrs. Vandergood sank back weakly. "You've mistaken. My name's Jane."

"Yeah," Olive said, "Pearl Jane Beggs, moll of Bill Beggs the Bear Baron. Well, waddaya know!" She shook her head in amazement, her scraggly hair bobbing with each motion. "I knew I'd seen that puss somewheres before. One of my trials came right after Bill's once. I saw you in court. Remember? You slipped me a pack of cigs."

Mrs. Vandergood really rose this time. "No, I do not remember."

"You don't have to, toots," Salty said. "We do. I remember Bill Beggs' frail very well, and you're it. Maybe a little more leathery than you were in them days but—"

"Glory be!" Mother said. "Pearl Jane Beggs. I saw your picture in the papers." She shot out of her chair and into the living room, returning with a bottle of liquor clutched ecstatically to her bosom. "Pearl

Jane Beggs," she repeated, slapping the bottle on the table. "Well, I'll be! Come on, folks. *Now* let's have some fun!"

Olive and Salty waited no second invitation. They drew up chairs and, without anyone's leaving the table, glasses appeared from somewhere. Mental Jiu Jitsu again, I guess. Anyway, nobody said anything. Mrs. V. took a big gulp of liquor and Betty took one and Mother took one and Olive and Salty and I took one each and then I went into the living room to get another bottle because that one was empty.

When I got back I noticed the atmosphere had kind of changed. Betty looked scared. Mrs. V.'s hair had straggled and her little black eyes were wide-open and popping. And Salty was saying, "Relax, Pearl. We won't hurt you. All that bunkem about ghosts is bunkem."

So then I knew the worst was out about Olive and Salty. Probably Betty and Mrs. V. not only knew they were dead but that they were related to me too. I didn't know which was worse.

Finally Mrs. V. found her voice and asked exactly what I knew she was going to ask: whether any of the—er—people where Olive and Salty came from communicated with the living in steganography.

"Never heard of it," Olive said.

Mrs. V. explained that it was a way of writing in cipher.

"Why should they," Olive asked, "if they can speak English and the people who are taking it down can read it?"

That stumped Mrs. V.

I kept looking at Betty to see how she was taking all that about her mother's past and the skeletons, to be almost literal, in *our* closet, but I couldn't tell anything from her face. Salty started to sing and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Except me. Then Olive asked Mrs. V. about Bill Beggs and Mrs. V. lost her icy accent and broke down and admitted everything and said Bill was still in stir. After another drink she said he had left her very well fixed financially and that she would always be grateful to him. With that she sneaked a side glance at Betty. "Your Daddy's very fond of you," she said.

"My Daddy!" Betty looked up suddenly, her eyes widening. "You mean Bill Beggs is my *Daddy?* That I'm not Betty Vandergood at *all?*"

Mrs. V. nodded sadly.

"Why, Mother," Betty said delightedly. "I always thought I came from such dull people. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I wanted to spare you, my child," Mrs. Va—or I guess I can call her Mrs. Beggs now—said tearfully.

"Alan!" Betty shouted all in one breath. "My Daddy's bucanneer Bill Beggs the Beer Baron and I can go to see him in Sing Sing!" She rushed around the table and threw her arms around my neck.

IN SPITE of what I had thought her mother was, I had always known Betty was my type. I pulled her head down and gave her a slightly drunken kiss. Both our Mammas beamed.

Just then the clock struck. Immediately, though I hadn't been thinking about it at all, I knew what it meant. I looked at Olive and Salty. They were sitting in pathetic stillness, their cavernous eyes caught midway in a smile.

"Twelve o'clock," Salty said. "Olive—"

"Time for one drink!" She gulped hurriedly and rose, linking her arm in Salty's good left.

They looked down at us for a moment, as if to stamp the picture of Life and what Life meant—our firm, blood-filled bodies; the table laden with food and drink—'till the end of time on their dead retinas.

Slowly Salty raised his hook in salute. "Well, good-by folks. Thanks for everything. Luck to you all. . . .

"See you next year," I said. I tried to

sound cheerful, but somehow there was a lump in my throat. At the beginning of the evening I'd have given anything to be rid of them, but now—

"Maybe . . ."

They turned slowly and walked toward the wall against which the buffet stood. There was no door there, no window. They just kept walking, into the buffet, into the wall, into nothing.

For a long moment we were silent. I could still see their pathetic, ragged figures strolling reluctantly arm in arm into that void. I looked down. There was a moth-eaten full dress coat and a green smock crumpled on the floor at my feet.

I looked up quickly and swallowed hard. "That way lies heaven—or hell." I raised my glass. "Here's to them," I said.

"Here's to you," Pearl Jane Beggs said softly. "May you be as happy as Bill and I were."

Mother just kept staring at the wall where the buffet stood.

Because the Moon is Far

By KATHERINE SIMONS

BECAUSE the moon is far I have grown weary
Of Earth and earthly things.
I find the same recurrent seasons dreary
And crave Saturnian springs.

What nights are there of diamond-white desire
Where Mercury has found
The stairways of the sun? What peaks aspire
From Pluto's outer ground?

It may be, in the ghostly, frozen spinneys
Of Neptune's sunless morn,
The flying serpent nests and that there whinnies
The milk-white unicorn.

In slumber tangent to the arc of wonder
I feel the fire hail
Of Jupiter and—through primeval thunder—
I hear his dragons wail.

Let him who thinks he winnows truth from seeming
And candleflame from star
Accept reality but leave me dreaming—
Because the moon is far.

The Third Cry to Legba

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Suddenly I was aware of great shapes moving in the rain, and heard the sound of voices that were not of my city nor yet of any that I ever knew.

—LORD DUNSANY,
The Madness of Andelsprutz.

THE glare and the clatter died at the same instant throughout the Club Samedi. Even the buzzing crowd-noise suspended in expectation. Behind the orchestra sounded a gong. Once. Twice. Thrice. . . .

The master of ceremonies intoned:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

The gong chimed on to twelve, and stopped. A clarinetist piped certain minor notes. A mixed quartet began to croon:

"Ihro mahnda . . . ihro mahnda. . . ."

A spotlight, dim and brownish, bored through the smoky air. Into it paced a black-robed figure, bowed face hidden under cascading black locks. To the center of the dance floor moved the silent, slow shape. *"Ihro mahnda . . ."* breathed the quartet.

A sudden explosive gesture. The robe swirled away, the head lifted. There stood a woman, a long-limbed dancer figure, clad as scantily as night clubs permit. Her face was lovely, tense, rapt. Her eyes burned out of slant sockets. The clarinet squealed louder, a tom-tom slogged into rhythm. The dance began, grotesque, nimble, quickening.

The dancer's flower-mouth spewed out words, soft and solemn:

"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"

Louder sang the dancer called Illyria, and louder grew the quartet's obligato—*"Ihro mahnda, ihro mahnda. . . ."*

Illyria spun her body. Her flying hair strained outwards in a bushy umbrella. Her arms writhed like snakes, seeming to glide caressingly over her body. Her bare, rouged toes clapped out a pattern of sound in time with the drumbeat. She sang always: *"Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"*

And suddenly she froze into a strange, updrawn statue, face lifted, hair back, arms out. At the same instant all the music hushed. A tuxedoed attendant stole into the spotlight's brown glow, holding out a fluttering something—a rooster, speckled black and white. Greedily Illyria seized it, her long, strong hands clutching. The sickening crackle of broken bones was audible. She dropped the rooster, which flopped spasmodically. The attendant seized it and backed away. Illyria snatched her cloak and sped out of sight. Lights came up, the orchestra played a gay flourish.

"You've just seen an authentic voodoo dance-ritual," blatted the master of ceremonies into his microphone. "Never done before, except in a real meeting of the cult—but it'll be done tomorrow midnight, and the midnight following, and every midnight after that. . . ."

John Thunstone's table was well back from ringside. He was a man almost

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

The keeper of the Gate must be invoked to open the way between worshiper and other-world; the password is a voodoo sacrifice.

12
HUMISTON

too big to be reassuring, and most of his clothes had to be tailored especially for him. His hands and eyes were sensitive, his big nose had been twice broken, his black hair and mustache showed a little streaking of gray. He sat as relaxed as a big contented cat, and sipped his highball. His eyes gazed somehow hopefully at his companion.

She was as blonde as John Thunstone was dark, of medium height and of figure both full and fine. Above her dark velvet gown her bare shoulders and arms were creamy white. Her large, level eyes shone bluer than the sapphires at her ears and throat. Her lips smiled without parting, in the manner associated with the Mona Lisa and the Empress Josephine. "Was it what you expected, John?" she asked gently.

He rocked his big, close-combed head in what might have been yes or no. "It gave the impression of authenticity," he temporized. "Not that I'm well grounded in voodoo."

"You always were sunk deep in occultism and magic," she rallied him. "Deeper than you'd admit to anyone. Even to me."

He looked at her sidelong. "And you were piqued, eh? Enough to go abroad because you thought I wasn't telling you all I should of my studies—to go abroad and marry Count Monteseco—"

"Which is past, and not particularly nice to bring up."

He sipped again. "I never meant to snub you, Sharon. Not then or now. But the little I know of magic spells danger. And I don't want to let anyone in for it. Least of all you. I hope you don't still condemn me."

Her small hand crept across to touch his big one. "I'm with you tonight. Isn't that enough?"

He looked as if it wasn't, and listened to the dance music. Then: "No, I'm not well grounded in voodoo. Don't understand it at all. Neither, I suspect, do the voodoo worshipers themselves. After all, what is voodoo? African jungle worship, or modified European witchcraft, or both —or neither?" His eyes seemed to study something unseen to any but himself. "Did you hear the words of that ritual?"

"French, or French patois, weren't they?" suggested the lady he called Sharon. "That quartet sang something like *'ibro mahnda.'* Mightn't they mean *'hereux monde'*—happy world?"

"Or perhaps *'ira au monde'*—roughly meaning, 'it shall happen to the world'."

"Which I call ingenius interpretation," said a voice beside the table, a voice soft, deep and gently amused.

Thunstone shot up out of his chair with that abrupt transition from relaxed ease to ready action which sometimes irritates his friends. He faced someone as tall as himself, and broader, almost deformedly deep of chest. Above European-cut dress clothes and jeweled studs not in the best of taste rode a huge high-craniumed head, either bald or shaven, with a grand hooked nose and eyes as gray and cold as frozen milk.

"I am also an enthusiast for voodoo," said the newcomer silkily. "May I introduce myself? Rowley Thorne."

He offered a big, over-manicured hand. Thunstone took it.

"I'm John Thunstone. Countess, may I present Mr. Thorne? The Countess Monteseco."

ROWLEY THORNE gracefully kissed her fingers. Without waiting to be invited, he sat down in a chair between them. "Waiter! Champagne, I think, is best traditional usage for cementing of new friendships."

The champagne was brought. Rowley Thorne toasted them, and his gray eyes narrowed over the glass. "I was sitting almost back of you, and heard your won-

derings about this Illyria and her dance. I can help a little, I have traveled in Haiti. Yes, the ritual is authentic, an invocation of Legba."

"Legba?" echoed the Countess. "A voodoo god?"

"One of them. Damballa is more important, and Erzulie perhaps more picturesque. But Legba is the great necessity. He's keeper of the Gate—must be invoked to open the way between worshiper and other-world, to permit prayers to mightier gods. It's like speaking a password. Impressive, that bit with the fowl. Other voodoo sacrifices are killed by cutting the throat. Legba's sacrifices die of a broken neck."

The Countess shivered, and Thunstone saw. "Suppose we change the subject," he said.

"Suppose we don't," she rejoined warmly. "Mr. Thorne is willing to talk of magic, though you aren't. And I'm fascinated. Tell us more about Legba, Mr. Thorne."

"He's said to be a shaggy or furry creature with red eyes. He's also called Baron Cimmiterre—master of the graveyard—and Baron Carrefours—master of crossroads. The prayer to him for opening the gate is always preliminary to a prayer elsewhere."

The Countess' blue eyes were bluer. "And what can Legba, Baron Cimmiterre, Baron Carrefours, do for a worshiper?"

"He can but open the gate," said Rowley Thorne. "Hark, music—Latin American. Will the Countess honor me?"

Thunstone rose and bowed them away from the table, but did not sit down again. As the Countess danced off with Rowley Thorne, he swiftly skirted the outer fringe of tables, spoke earnestly to the head waiter, offering some bills. The head waiter led him to a side passage indicating a row of dressing room doors. "Number two, sir," he said and Thunstone knocked.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice from within.

"Press," said Thunstone. "After a feature story."

The door opened. Illyria smiled there, hastily wrapped in a robe of flowered silk. "Come in, Mr.—"

"Thunstone."

He entered. She gave him a cordial hand, and sat down by her dressing table. "What paper, Mr. Thunstone?"

"I write for magazines and syndicates," he said truthfully. She accepted a cigarette from his case, and he went on: "I'm interested in your voodoo dance."

SHE chuckled. "Oh, that. I was in Martinique a year ago. My doctor said I had to have fresh salt air and warm weather. Martinique was cheap, and I was broke—don't print that, though. Say I was fascinated enough to join the voodoo cult. Because I was."

"Many white people in it?" asked Thunstone.

"Quite a few. But I think I was the only practical one. I knew I could make a sensation with voodoo stuff. And haven't I? Before this season's up, I'll be signed for a revue. After that, maybe stardom."

Thunstone looked at a bright print on the wall. "Isn't that a saint's picture—John the Baptist?"

"It is and it isn't." Illyria smiled at his blank look. "The voodoo people want pictures of their gods, to use for idols. The best they can do is regular holy pictures. For Damballa they use St. Patrick—because of the snakes. And John the Baptist is the hairiest, so they take him for Legba. That print was given me by the *houngon,* the medicine man you can call him, when he got real pictures."

"Real pictures?" echoed Thunstone.

"Some artist was making them, someone on Haiti. The Legba one would scare a top sergeant." She shrugged her shoulders

out of the robe in a mock shudder. "The artist's name was Thorne."

Thunstone stared. "Rowley Thorne?"

"Maybe. Rowley or Roland or something. I never met him, he stayed close to the big shots in Haiti. Now, what publicity pictures will you want?"

"Later," he said. "May I call again? Thanks."

He returned to his table, just as the Countess and Rowley Thorne finished their dance.

"Jealous?" smiled the Countess Monteseco in the homeward taxi. "Miffed because I found Mr. Thorne attractive?"

"Should I be?" Thunstone smiled back. "He was informative about voodoo."

"Wasn't he, though? No mock-mysterious puttings off on his part. He wants to explain all the things you've held out on me." Her smile grew wistful. "Men usually like to talk to me, about themselves and their interests. You're different from them all."

"Different, I hope, from Rowley Thorne."

"Which sounds as if you know more about him than you admitted. Here's my apartment house. Come upstairs and tell me about him."

"I'll come up," said Thunstone, "but I'll not talk about Rowley Thorne. Because he's part of the magic that the world had better not know about."

TRUE to his stated policy, Thunstone did not ask the Countess to go back with him to the Club Samedi on the following night. But as he entered, after 11 o'clock, he wished he had. For she sat at a choice table, well forward to the floor show, with Rowley Thorne.

The lights seemed to blur, and the torch singer at the microphone—loud though she was—faded into the back of his consciousness; but he was sure he betrayed nothing of being startled or disappointed as he moved between the tables and Rowley Thorne stood up with a gentle smile of greeting.

"Mr. Thunstone, I was a guest at your table last night. Sit at mine tonight. Sharon said that she was sure you would come."

Sharon, he had said. They were at first names, she and Rowley Thorne. He looked down at her and said, "It's so nice to see you again. Thanks, Thorne. But it's my turn to buy a drink, eh? Waiter, the lady will have an old-fashioned. You like champagne, Mr. Thorne?"

"Champagne cocktail," ordered Thorne.

"Scotch and water," added Thunstone. As the waiter moved away, he said to Thorne, "This will become one of my favorite night spots."

"Illyria is a great drawing card," purred the other, his gray eyes estimating the throng of guests. "Not long now until her midnight act. Ever study the importance of midnight in occult ceremonies, Thunstone? It's exactly midway between sunset and sunrise. Allows the supernatural force to split the dark hours halfway —half for the summoning of courage and strength to come forth, half to do whatever is in hand to do."

"That's the kind of thing John always refuses to explain to me," interjected the Countess.

"You know why," he smiled to her. Then, to Thorne: "Last night you borrowed my lady for a dance. May I borrow yours?"

The singer had finished, the orchestra played. Thunstone and the Countess glided away together. Her bright hair came up to his chin. She gave him a quick, appraising flash of blue eyes.

"I really came here to meet you," she said. "You wouldn't invite me, so—"

"So you asked Rowley Thorne to oblige?"

"Hardly. He telephoned me. Enterprising gentleman, to find my address and so on. We had dinner, a theater, and lots

of fascinating talk. About your forbidden subject. Why don't you approve of him, John?"

"Haven't I said that I wouldn't talk about him?"

"And I suppose you won't, even to show me that I shouldn't go out with him any more. You're pretty stern in your policy. Or is it too strong a word, policy? Shouldn't I say prejudice or obsession?"

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "that I'm a very old-fashioned dancer."

"Which means that you dance only to please me. I'm really flattered, John."

Their dancing continued in silence. When they returned to the table, their drinks waited. Rowley Thorne was charming, exhibiting a strange ring with a cabinet setting, which he said had once held poison for a Borgia; and he had begun a good-humored discussion of thought transference, when the lights and sounds ceased as abruptly as before. The gong tolled, the master of ceremonies spoke: "Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

She was there, in the brown spotlight, throwing off her robe to dance and chant. *"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—"*

Thunstone felt a sudden light touch on his hand. Sharon, the Countess Monteseco, wanted to hold hands in the dark. For reasons of his own, he drew his fingers away, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom. Because something was there with Illyria, who should be alone in the center of the dance floor—it wasn't time yet for the man with the speckled rooster—

"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"

THAT old trick, taught him long ago by a Pennsylvania Dutch coon hunter—Thunstone closed his eyes tightly for a moment, then opened them wide. The darkness paled ever so slightly, to a sort of bluish dusk, and he saw it, saw the stir of motion above Illyria's tossing head. Branches of a tree, with long trailing leaves or moss—branches, or their shadow, here in the Club Samedi, far from any natural growth of any kind—and along the branch lay and quivered something, a definite hulk of substance that moved and lived within arm's reach of the dancer. . . .

"—immole'—hai!"

The speckled rooster was in her hands. She caught it by the neck, forced its head back and around. *Crrrrrack!*

Overhead something seemed to sag down for a moment, like a strand of fabric, or a tentacle, or an arm. Next moment Illyria was gone, the attendant with the dead rooster was gone, the lights were blinding, and —no branch showed waving from the ceiling.

"Tomorrow midnight will see Illyria repeat the voodoo-dance," the announcer was shouting, "and the midnight after that . . ."

Thunstone got up. "Good-night," he said, and bowed toward Sharon. "This is all I came to see."

"Must you go so soon?" she pleaded, and he nodded that he must. "Good-night, Thorne. I'll see you again. Later."

He put money in the waiter's hand and strolled away to the cloak-room. Retrieving his hat, he turned to go. Rowley Thorne was there beside him.

"You said you'd see me later," said Thorne. "Why not see me now, Thunstone? You know, I know all about you. You're an exhaustive researcher into certain things, to destroy them. I'm surprised that you don't know me."

"I do know all about you, Thorne, or as much as I want to know. I just didn't let on. You were kicked out of two European universities for pursuits the faculties abhorred. The police of France, England and India have all issued you standing dares to set foot on their territory. You'd be a known international crook if it wasn't for the fact that you steal or swindle only

enough to support you in luxury for your activity in the very thing I've been fighting."

Rowley Thorne bowed. "You being what you are, I wouldn't want any other estimate of myself from you. We've been on opposite sides for years, and now we're face to face. One of us will be hurt."

"I'm sure of that," said Thunstone. "Good-night, Thorne."

Thorne did not move from his way. The gray eyes were pale as moonlight. "I don't think, Thunstone, that you can afford to play tricks with me. For I haven't any vulnerable point. And you have, sitting at my table yonder."

Thunstone returned his stare. Where Thorne's gray eyes narrowed, Thunstone's widened a trifle.

"The Countess is charming," Thorne almost crooned. "You've thought so for years, haven't you? And yet you let her get away from you. Another man got her. Perhaps that will happen again."

"The future will tell," Thunstone replied. "I recognize her appeal to you, Thorne. Money, isn't it? She's rich."

"I'll need money for what I intend to do, for which the ground work is two-thirds complete." Thorne stepped aside and bowed. "I mustn't detain you longer, Thunstone. Good-night. Sleep well. Maybe I'll send you a dream."

Thunstone left the Club Samedi, but he did not sleep. He visited three people, all of them among his friends and all of them owing him favors.

FIRST of these was a high official of the New York police. The man argued vehemently but futilely against what Thunstone demanded, and finally agreed. "I don't know what the charge can be," he mourned lamely.

"Find one, and thanks."

Thunstone's next stop was in Harlem. He entered the modest but comfortable home of a smiling brown man who wore the round collar and high waistcoat of a preacher, and who shook Thunstone's hand warmly. They talked for a while, and the brown man's smile vanished. He took books from a shelf. The first of these was gaily striped in red and blue.

"'Tell My Horse,' by Zora Neale Hurston," said the brown man. "She's a Barnard graduate, a Guggenheim fellow, an anthropologist, and an open-minded truth seeker. She traveled a year in the West Indies, and wrote this book. Lippincott published it in 1938." His sepia-tinted finger found a place for Thunstone. "Read right there."

Thunstone noted the page number, 171. He began to read aloud: " . . . for Legba is never honored alone. He opens the gate so that the other gods come to their worshipers."

"Exactly," nodded the brown man, and leafed backward in the book. "Now. Read again."

THUNSTONE did so: "The way to all things is his hands. Therefore he is the first god in all Haiti in point of service."

The book fell shut, and the two men looked at each other above it.

"I'm thinking of an old legend, almost an outworn one," said Thunstone. "It's about a sorcerer's apprentice, who raised devils without thinking of the consequences. What's that next book?"

"It's by Montague Summers, the greatest authority on witchcraft." Brown hands opened it. "Here's the reference. He says that those who attend the ceremonies of evil without protesting or trying to stop them become, by acquiescence, participants in the cult. That would hardly include you —you attend to learn how to fight such things. The others, whether deliberately sympathetic or just unknowing, become cult-members."

"I hope not all," said Thunstone, think-

ing of fair hair and sapphire eyes. "And the third book there?"

"It's by Joseph J. Williams. Like Summers, he's a priest, a Jesuit. As a resident of Jamaica, he studied and wrote of voodoo and obeah. He mentions the missionary-effort of the cult to spread, and how the worshipers hope to transplant their evil spirits to other lands."

Thunstone frowned in thought. After a moment he said: "Legba, then, is to be invoked in conjunction with a prayer to some other spirit. But here he's invoked alone. Twice.

"A third time in succession—that's pretty familiar magical routine. He may give attention, and do something else beside open gates."

"Exactly." The dark man's head nodded slowly. "And, in a new place, a new power to profit—evil profit—will be placed in the hands of certain cult-founders. Your acquaintance, Rowley Thorne, won't have overlooked the chance. It is best that the ritual be somehow prevented this coming midnight."

"I think I've attended to that," said Thunstone. "And I half guessed these other matters. But I'm grateful for your agreement. I take your word on voodoo-fighting as better than any other man's. Well, I shan't keep you up any later."

"Heaven protect you," said the brown man in farewell.

Thunstone grinned. "Heaven's supposed to protect all fools."

"Yes, and all fighters for the right. Good-by."

His third call was to a small shop in a big building in mid-town. It was open, and a single person, a little grizzled old fellow, in charge. He greeted Thunstone warmly.

"I want," said Thunstone, "protection."

"For yourself?"

"Not for myself. A woman."

"Come into the back room." Thunstone followed the proprietor into a musty workshop. From a table the little man took a black velvet case and opened it.

"Silver," he pronounced. "Sovereign defense against evil."

"And set with sapphires," added Thunstone. "So much the better for my purpose."

"Observe, Mr. Thunstone, the pattern of the brooch. An interweaving of crosses. That flower, too—"

"A blossom of St. John's wort," said Thunstone. He peered at the brooch. "How old is it?"

The grizzled head shook. "Who can say? Yet the man I got it from says that it's a good thousand years old, and that it was designed and made by St. Dunstan." Shrewd old eyes twinkled at Thunstone. "Dunstan sounds like Thunstone, eh? He was like you, he was. A gentleman born and bred, who studied black magic—and caught Satan's nose in a pair of red-hot pincers!"

"How much?" asked Thunstone.

"To you, nothing. Not a cent. No, sir, don't argue. I owe you my life and more. Where shall I send it?"

"I'll give you the address, and a message."

Thunstone took out one of his cards, and wrote on the back:

> Sharon—
>
> I know you love sapphires. Won't you wear this for me, and take lunch with me today?
>
> John.

"It'll reach her early in the morning," promised the jeweler. Thunstone thanked him and departed.

The dark hours, ascribed by Rowley Thorne to supernatural agencies, had gone, and the sun was three-quarters up when Thunstone sought his bed.

SHARON, Countess Monteseco, was charming in tailored blue as she met Thunstone in the lobby of the restaurant.

Her one piece of jewelry was the sapphire-and silver brooch.

"Why so glum, John?" she asked as they sought their table. "Cross? Because I gave a date to Rowley?"

"First names with you, too," he murmured. "No, Sharon, not cross. I haven't a right to be, have I?"

"Rowley said that you and he quarreled about me last night."

"We discussed you," admitted Thunstone. "But if we had quarreled, seriously, one or the other of us would not be on view today."

They paused as a waiter drifted up to take their order. Over the cocktail, Sharon said, "You won't object, then, if Rowley takes me to the Club Samedi again tonight."

Thunstone scowled a little. "Club Samedi? But it's been closed. Some little technicality about the precautions against fire. I saw a couple of lines in the morning paper."

"I know about that, but it'll open in a few days. Meanwhile, there'll be a late rehearsal of the entertainers tonight. No guests, but—"

"If no guests, how are you and Thorne going to be present?"

She smiled a little. "You are interested, after all, even interested enough to interrupt me. It happens that Rowley has bought an interest in the Club Samedi. He'll be present, and he said he'd call for me at 11 o'clock." She paused, and looked at him shyly. "If you would care to see me earlier in the evening . . ."

He shook his head. "I'd care to, but I can't. I have something that, as Jules de Grandin would put it, demands to be done. Sharon, do you know where Rowley Thorne lives?"

"Not exactly. I think somewhere near Gramercy Park—yes, on East Nineteenth Street. Why, John?"

He did not answer that, but gazed at the brooch she wore. He put forth a finger and touched it lightly. "Now, I'll ask a favor. I don't do that often, do I? Sharon, wear this tonight."

"Oh, I meant to. I love it, John. It's a beautiful old thing."

The food arrived, and Thunstone had not told her why he wanted Thorne's address. But, after they parted, he again called on the police official who had, at his request, closed the Club Samedi. He asked several questions, and waited while his friend made telephone calls and checked many papers. Finally the policeman gave him an address on Nineteenth Street. "Don't know what floor, John," said the policeman. "We'll know tomorrow, if—"

"Tomorrow may be too late," Thunstone told him. "Now, one last favor. If I'm arrested tonight for house-breaking, will you do what you can to get me a light sentence?"

THE particular block on East Nineteenth Street was a shabby, quiet one. It was past ten o'clock when Rowley Thorne emerged from a building with a yellow-brick front. He was dressed magnificently in evening clothes, with a cape falling from his thick shoulders in dignified folds. He got into a waiting taxi, which rolled to the corner, then uptown. After it had gone, John Thunstone emerged from behind a basement stairway railing opposite and entered the door of the building.

On the right wall of the vestibule were five mail slots, each topped with a name and a bell button. Thunstone studied the names.

None of them remotely resembled Rowley Thorne's name. On Thunstone's brow appeared the creasy frown that showed his descent into deep thought. Then he approached his forefinger to the button at the rear of the row, beside a lettered label reading *BOGAN, 5*. At the last moment he did not touch that button, but

the one above the next slot, which was marked *LEONARD, 4.*

A moment of silence, then the lock of the door emitted a muffled buzzing. Thunstone turned the knob and entered. A narrow hallway revealed itself, with a staircase mounting upward. Thunstone started to climb, swiftly and softly for all his size.

He came to the top of two flights of stairs without adventure. At the top of the third waited a stocky man in a sleeveless undershirt. "Yeah?" he prompted.

"Mr. Bogan?" asked Thunstone.

"Nah, my name's Leonard." The man jerked a thumb upward. "Bogan's on the top floor."

"I see. Thanks." Thunstone's eye caught a gleam at the center of Leonard's throat—a cheap gold-plaited crucifix. "Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Leonard."

"That's all right." The man shuffled back into his apartment. Thunstone mentally crossed him off of a possible investigation list; no partner of Rowley Thorne would wear a crucifix.

He went up the last flight of stairs. Halfway to the top he heard voices, a man's and a woman's, in furious argument.

"I'm fed up," the man was saying vehemently. "I'm tired of all this constant pretending. We're through."

"That suits me fine, and double," rejoined the woman. "Okay, get out."

"Get out?" the man echoed scornfully. "Me get out? Listen, I pay the rent of this place. You're the one that's getting out."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort! It's my furniture, isn't it? Didn't my own mother give it to us? Well, I'm not walking away and leaving you in possession of my furniture—"

Thunstone permitted himself to smile. Plainly there would be no room for Rowley Thorne's career of strange study and experiment in such an atmosphere as that....

He descended to the third floor. He knocked at the door. There was no answer. After listening a moment, he produced a great bundle of keys. The third of them unlocked the door, and he entered. Enough light came through the windows for him to see the interior, comfortable though dingy. There were five rooms, and in one of these was a bed, on which lay the drunkest man Thunstone had met in many months. Thunstone's search was for writings and books. There were no writings, and only two books. Thunstone carried them to the window. One was a cheap, worn copy of "Gone with the Wind," the other a New Testament. Thunstone left the apartment without hesitation.

The apartment on the second floor was occupied by three working girls. Thunstone introduced himself as a field man for a national poll, and asked questions that brought forth the readiest of answers. Within half a dozen exchanges he absolved this apartment too of any Rowley Thorne influence, but it was with difficulty he made his exit; the girls were expecting company, and wanted to exhibit their poll-making visitor.

Finally he tapped at the door on the first floor. A pudgy middle-aged woman answered the knock. "Is this the superintendent's apartment?" asked Thunstone.

She shook her head. "No. He's in the basement. That is, he was. I think he went out just now, all dressed up for lodge or something."

"I'll talk to his wife," said Thunstone.

"Ain't got a wife. Just him."

"What kind of superintendent is he?"

"All right. Kind of close-mouthed and cross. But I'd rather have them that way than too talky. Why?"

"I'm thinking of moving in here," Thunstone told her.

"You can't. House is full up."

Thunstone thanked her, and turned as if to leave. When her door closed, he tiptoed down the basement stairs.

BUT the door was fitted with a patent lock. His keys would not open it. Thunstone drew out a pocket knife and whittled knowingly at a panel. He made a hole big enough to admit one hand, and unfastened the door from within. Then he moved stealthily inside, past a furnace and coal bin, to an inner door.

This, too, had a strong and complicated lock, but its hinges were on the outside. Thunstone managed to grub out the pins and lifted the door bodily out. He walked into the silent room beyond.

It was dimly lighted, by a little lamp on a shelf. Thunstone walked to it. There sat a small stone image of extreme ugliness. Thunstone sniffed at the lamp. "Ghee," he muttered under his breath. "Indian god—Indian worship." On the same shelf were several books, two of them in languages that Thunstone could not read. The others were on occult subjects, and all except one had been proscribed, banned and outlawed by various governments.

Thunstone moved into the other room of the caretaker's apartment. Another shelf held more idols, of various makes. Before one burned a long stick of incense. A second was of wood. The caretaker apparently observed several worships, each with its proper and esoteric ritual. On the table were several papers.

The first was a carbon copy of an agreement, whereby Rowley Thorne agreed to pay within thirty days the sum of ten thousand dollars for a half interest in the fixtures and profits of the Club Samedi. The second was a penciled scrawl, by someone of limited education but undeniable shrewdness, reporting on the financial affairs of Sharon, Countess Monteseco. The third was in ink, on scented stationery, the writing of an educated woman:

Thursday.

Like you, I feel that too many worshipers spoil a worship. If you find what you seek, then you will be master of a faith never before followed, and I shall be content, as always, to be your servant. When you have miracles to show, others will bring service and wealth. If this is what you have always wanted, I will be glad, so glad. Even if it must be gained by your gallantry to that blonde fool, I will be glad.

Thunstone did not know the name signed to this letter, but it completed his search for knowledge. He glanced at his wrist watch—the illuminated dial showed that it was 11:30. Quickly he unfastened the front door of the apartment, hurried up the outer steps, and on to the corner, where he waved wildly for a taxi.

"Club Samedi," he bade the driver.

"The Samedi's closed down," the driver began to say.

"Club Samedi," repeated Thunstone, "and drive like the devil."

HE REACHED the rear of the club by entering a restaurant, bribing a waiter, and walking out through the kitchen. Across a courtyard was the dingy back door. He tried the door stealthily. It was locked, and he did not attempt to pick the lock. Instead he turned to where several garbage cans were lined against the wall. One of these he set on the other, climbed gingerly upon them, and with a sudden leap was able to clutch the guttered edge of the roof.

For a moment he clung, then, swaying powerfully sidewise and at the same time flexing the muscles of his big arms, he drew himself up, hooked a heel into the gutter. He dragged his body up on the flat roof and stole across it to a skylight.

Cautiously he peered in and down. The room below was dark, but he caught a gleam from pots and pans on a rack—this would be the kitchen. He pushed himself through feet first, lowered himself to

the full length of his arms, and dropped.

Noise he must have made, but nobody challenged him. He dared to strike a match. On an oven-top he saw a cardboard box, marked SALT. He eagerly clutched it.

"Lafcadio Hearn commented on it," he said under his breath. "So did W. B. Seabrook. I'm set."

He tiptoed toward the service door to the club auditorium. As he reached it, he heard the voice of the master of ceremonies:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

THE voodoo music began, clarinet and tom-tom, and masked the slight noise of Thunstone's entrance.

From the kitchen threshold he could see Illyria's dance begin in the brown glow of the spotlight. To one side stood Rowley Thorne, extra big in the gloom, his hands quelling the struggles of the sacrificial rooster. Plainly he would substitute for the regular assistant. The only spectator was Sharon, sitting beyond the spotlight at a ringside table.

This much Thunstone saw at his first glance. His second marked the other presence in the darkened club.

There was a swaying above Illyria, a swaying in time to music. A great fronded shadow drooped lower and lower, as if a heavy weight forced it down. The jungle foliage that Thunstone had seen before had returned to being inside the ceiling, and the shaggy bulk was upon it, edging stealthily close to Illyria.

"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, immole'—hai!"

And, *"Ibro mahnda!"* chanted the drummer and Thorne, doing duty for the absent quartet.

"Ibro mahnda. . . . Ibro mahnda!"

The climax of the dance was approaching. Faster and faster went the music, then died suddenly as Illyria struck her pose, head back and arms out. Rowley Thorne stole forward, holding the rooster at arm's length. And yet another pair of arms were reaching, enormous arms from above, like the distorted shadows of arms on a lighted screen, but arms which ended in clumsy claws and not hands, arms tufted and matted in hair. . . .

Thunstone darted forward. Under one arm he held the salt-box. His other hand caught Thorne's wrist, wrung it like a dishcloth. Thorne gasped in startled pain, and the rooster sprang free, running crookedly across the floor.

A great streak of gloomy shadow pursued it, something like claws made a grab at it, and missed. Thorne suddenly began to rave:

"Legba, Legba! I wasn't at fault—a stranger—down on your knees, all of you! Death is in this room! Death to your bodies, and your souls, too!"

His voice had the power to command. All of them floundered to their knees, all save Thunstone and the shaggy bulk that was sliding down through the shadows of foliage. . . .

Thunstone tore open the salt package. One hand clutched as much salt as it could hold. The other threw the box, and it struck something that, however ill-defined in the brown light, certainly had solidity. The missile burst like a shell, scattering its contents everywhere.

Thunstone will remember to his death the prolonged wave of high sharp sound that might have been scream or roar, and might even have had words mixed into it —words of whatever unidentified tongue formed the voodoo rituals. A grip fastened upon him, a great embracing pressure that might have been talon-like hands or coils like a huge serpent. He felt his ribs buckle and creak, but he let himself be lifted, gathered close. And he put out his handful of salt, swiftly but coolly and

orderly, and thrust it well at the point where a face should be.

The surface on which he spread the salt opposed his hand for but a moment. Then it was gone, and so was the grip on his body. He fell hard and sprawling, but was up again in an instant. Overhead there were no branches. There was nothing. But just at Thunstone's feet lay Illyria. The light was enough to show him that, at some point in the proceedings, her neck had been broken, like the neck of a speckled fowl sacrificed to Legba.

He went to a wall, found a switch, and flicked it. The room filled with light. "Get up, everybody," he ordered, and they did so. Only Illyria lay where she had fallen.

HE WALKED back among them. "Salt did it. Salt will always drive away the most evil of spirits. It was something that Mr. Thorne had not planned for, that I'd attend his rehearsal, too."

"You've caused the death of Illyria," accused Thorne. His face looked pallid and old, and his gray eyes roved sickly in it.

"No. You doomed her when you first took an interest in this matter of invoking Legba. It's possible that her unthinking invocation would have resulted in unpleasantness, but no more. Your knowledge and deliberate espousal of the activity made the coming of Legba dangerous.

"He'd have come at the third time, if I weren't here to prevent him. He would have come with other powers than the mere opening of gates, for you prayed to no other voodoo diety. A cult could have been founded here, and not even heaven knows how it may have developed."

Thunstone looked around at the shivering listeners. "You others are lucky. Thorne intended to bind you all to Legba, by the sheer fact of your witnessing the cult's beginning. He's the sort who could do it. You'd have been made to help him establish Legba-worship with this club as a headquarters, and with money he intended to get from—"

He felt the wide gaze of Sharon, and said no more, but walked to her.

At her side, he turned on Thorne once again.

"Whatever money you get, you must get elsewhere now. I don't think that Sharon will listen to you further. I'll be amused to know how you are going to meet a debt of ten thousand dollars, when you have been living on sheer wit, bluff and evil. But whatever you do, Thorne, do as honestly as possible. I intend to keep watch upon you."

Sharon caught Thunstone's arm with one hand. The other clung to the brooch on her bosom. "I don't exactly understand . . ." she breathed.

"Of course not. You weren't supposed to. It will take time to make itself clear. But meanwhile we'll go. Thorne will have his hands full and his mind full, inventing a plausible explanation for the death of the club's star dancer."

Nobody moved as Thunstone conducted Sharon to the street.

"John," she said, "I only half-saw that something was coming into view. What? And from where?"

"It came through the gate beyond which such things have life and power. And you may call it Legba, if you want to remember it by name."

"I don't," and she put her hands to her face.

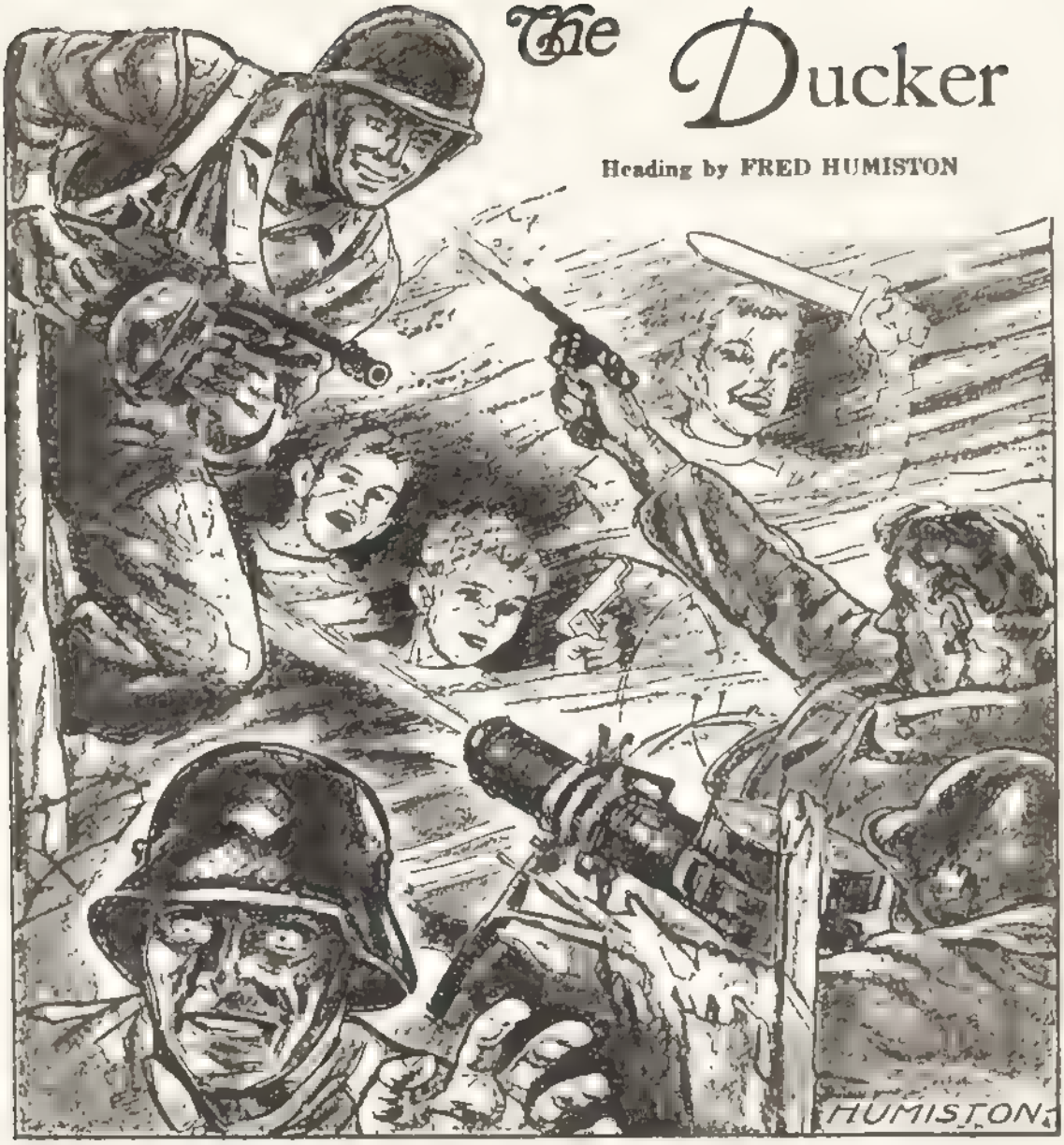
"Then I seem to have made a point. Evil magic isn't to be poked into, is it? Not unless you're able to take both precautions and risks. Shall I see you home, Sharon?"

"Please. And stay there and talk to me until the sun rises again."

"Until the sun rises again," repeated John Thunstone.

The Ducker

Heading by FRED HUMISTON



By RAY BRADBURY

THE transport was loaded, ready to leave at midnight. Feet shuffled up long wooden gangplanks. A lot of songs were being sung. A lot of silent goodbyes were being said to New York Harbor. Military insignia flashed in the loading lights. . . .

Johnny Choir wasn't afraid. His khaki-clad arms trembled with excitement and uncertainty, but he wasn't afraid. He held

Maybe it's wrong to grow up believing in reality—
and things like bullets and death.

on to the railing and thought. The thinking came down over him like a bright shell, cutting out the soldiers, the transport, the noise. He thought about the days that had slipped by him.

A few years before—

Days in the green park, down by the creek, under the shady oaks and elms, near the gray-planked benches and the bright flowers. The kids, he among them, came like an adolescent avalanche down the tall hillsides, yelling, laughing, and tumbling.

Sometimes they'd have carven hunks of wood with clothes-pins from the wash-line for triggers; rubber bands, snapped and flicked through the summer air, for ammunition. Sometimes they'd have cap-guns, exploding pointedly at one another. And most of the time when they couldn't afford powder-caps, they just pointed their dime revolvers at one another and shouted:

"Bang! You're dead!"

"Bang-bang—I gotcha!"

It wasn't simple as all that, though. Arguments rose, quick, hot, short, and over in a minute.

"Bang, I gotcha!"

"Aw, you missed me a mile! *Boom!* There, I got *you!*"

"Oh, no you didn't either! How could you get me? You were shot. You were dead. You couldn't shoot me."

"I already said you missed me. I ducked."

"Aw, you can't duck a bullet. I pointed right at you."

"I *still* ducked."

"Nuts. You always say that, Johnny. You don't play right. You're shot. You gotta lay down!"

"But I'm the sergeant—I can't die."

"Well, I'm better than a sergeant. I'm a captain."

"If you're a captain, then I'm a general!"

"*I'm* a major-general!"

I quit. You don't play fair."

The eternal wrangling for position, the bloody noses and hoarse name-calling, the promised retribution of "I'll tell my Dad on you." All of it a part and parcel of being a wild horseling of eleven, with the bit out of your buck-toothed mouth all during June and July and August.

AND only in autumn did the parents ride out after you and the other fiery colts, to rope you and brand you behind the ears with soap and water and chuck you off to that corral with the red-brick walls and the rusty bell in the tower. . . .

That wasn't so long ago. Just—seven years.

He was still a kid inside. His body had grown, stretched, towered, tanned its skin, hardened its muscle, darkened its tawny shock of long hair, tightened its lines around jaw and eyes, thickened fingers and knuckles, but the brain didn't feel as if it had grown in sympathy with the rest. It was still green; full of tall lush oaks and elms in summer; a creek ran through it, and the kids climbed around on its convolutions shouting, "This way, gang—we'll take a short-cut and head them off at Dead Man's Gulch!"

Boat whistles blew their tops. Manhattan's metal buildings tossed back an echo of them. Gangplanks clattered up and away. Men's voices shouted.

Johnny Choir was aware of it, suddenly. His wild, quick thoughts were stampeded by the reality of the ship nosing out into the harbor. He felt his hands trembling on the cold iron rail. Some of the boys sang "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." They made a lot of warm noise.

"Come out of it, Choir," someone said. Eddie Smith came and brushed Johnny Choir's elbow. "Penny for your thoughts."

Johnny looked at all that dark, glittering water. "Why ain't I in 4-F?" he said simply.

Eddie Smith looked at the water, too, and laughed. "Why?"

Johnny Choir said, "I'm only a kid. I'm only ten years old. I like ice-cream cones and candy bars and roller skates. I want my mama."

Smith rubbed his small white chin.

"You got the most distorted sense of humor, Choir. So help me. You say all you got to say with the perfect dead-pan expression. Someone else might think you were serious. . . ."

Johnny spit slowly over the side, experimentally, to see how long it would take the spit to reach the water. Not long. Then he tried to watch where it landed to see how long he could still see it. Not long, either.

Smith said, "Here we go. Don't know where, but we're going. Maybe England, maybe Africa, maybe Who Knows?" "Do—do those other guys play fair, Private Smith?"

"Huh?"

Johnny Choir gestured. "If you shoot those other guys over there, then they got to fall down, don't they?"

"Hell, yes. But, why—"

"And they can't shoot back if they get shot first."

"That's a basic fact of war. You shoot the other guy first, he's out of the fight. Now, why are you—"

"That's all right then," said Johnny Choir. His stomach eased down soft and nice inside him. Resting light and smooth, his hands didn't twitch on the rail any more.

"As long as that is a basic rule, Private Smith, then I got nothing to be afraid of. I'll play. I'll play war good."

Smith stared at Johnny.

"If you play war like you talk war, it's gonna be a funny kind of war, I'll say so."

The sound of the boat whistle hit against the clouds. The ship cut out of New York Harbor under the stars.

And Johnny Choir slept like a teddy-bear all that night. . . .

THE African landing was warm, fast, simple, uneventful. Johnny lugged his equipment in his big easy-swinging hands, found his assigned company truck and the long hot delivery inland from Casablanca began. He sat tallest in his row, facing another row of friends in the rear of the truck. They bounced, jiggled, laughed, smoked, joked all along the way, and it was quite a bit of fun.

One thing Johnny Choir noticed was how nice the officers were to one another. None of the officers stomped their feet and cried, "I want to be general or I won't play! "I want to be captain or *I* won't play!" They took orders, gave orders, rescinded orders and asked for orders in a crisp military fashion that seemed, to Johnny, to be the finest bit of play acting ever. It seemed a hard thing to act that way all the time, but they did. Johnny admired them for it and never questioned their right to give him orders. Whenever he didn't know what to do, they told him. They were helpful. Heck. They were okay. Not like in the old days when everybody argued about who was going to be general or sergeant or corporal.

Johnny said nothing of his thoughts to anyone. Whenever he had time he just kept them and mulled them over. It was so bewildering. This was the biggest game he had ever played—uniforms, bigger guns and everything and—

The long dusty trip inland over jolting roads and glorified cowpaths was little more than bumps, shouts and sweat to Johnny Choir. This didn't smell like Africa. It smelled like sun, wind, rain, mud, heat, sweat, cigarettes, trucks, oil, gasoline. Universal odors that denied all the Dark menace of the old geography book Africa. He looked hard but he didn't see any colored men with juju paint on

their black faces. The rest of the time he was too engrossed spooning food into his mouth, and coming down the hash-line for second helpings.

It was one hot noon one hundred miles from the Tunisian border, with Johnny just finishing his lunch, when a German Stuka fell out of the sun, coming right for Johnny. It spit bullets.

Johnny stood there and watched it. Tin plates, eating utensils, helmets clattered, shining, on the hard-packed sand as the other company members scattered, yelling, and dug their noses into ditches and behind boulders, behind trucks and jeeps.

Johnny stood there grinning the kind of grin you always use when you look straight at the sun. Someone yelled, "Choir, duck!"

The dive bomber strafed, slugging, punching. Johnny stood straight up with his spoon raised to his mouth. Little pocks exploded dust into a showered line a few feet to one side of him. He watched the line tiptoe instantly by him and go spattering on a few yards before the Stuka lifted gilded wings and went away.

Johnny watched it out of sight.

Eddie Smith peered over the edge of a jeep. "Choir, you nut. Why didn't you get behind the truck?"

Johnny ate again. "That guy couldn't hit the side of a barn-door with a bucket of paint."

Smith looked at him as if he were a Saint in a niche in a church. "You're either the bravest guy I know or the dumbest."

"I guess maybe I'm brave," said Johnny though his voice sounded a bit uncertain, as if he couldn't make up his mind yet.

Smith snorted. "Hell. The way you talk."

THE inland movement continued. Rommel was entrenched at Mareth and the British 8th was drawing up, readying its heavy artillery for a barrage that, rumor had it, would start in approximately five days. The long queque of trucks reached the Tunisian border, ground over and up into hill country. . . .

The Afrika Korps had stormed through Kasserine Pass almost to the border of Tunisia, and now they were retreating back toward Gafsa.

"That's swell," was all Johnny Choir would say. "That's the way it should be."

Choir's infantry moved up at long last for their first engagement. Their first look at the way the enemy ran, fell down, got up or stayed down for a longer interval, flew, shot, yelled or just plain vanished in a cumulus of dust.

A certain laughing tenseness went through the members of his unit. Johnny felt it and couldn't figure it out. But he pretended to be tense, too, once in a while. It was fun. He didn't smoke the cigarettes offered him.

"They make me choke," he explained.

Now the orders were given. American units, coming down onto Tunisian plain, would drive toward Gafsa. Johnny Choir was going with them in his role as buck private.

Instructions were barked out, maps were supplied to company commanders, tank groups, anti-tank half-tracks, artillery, infantry.

The air arm swung, shining hard, overhead. Johnny thought they looked mighty pretty.

Things started exploding. The hot plainland was running over with a lethal tide of snipers' shots, machine-gun fire, artillery blasts. And Johnny Choir ran along behind a screen of advancing tanks with Eddie Smith about ten yards ahead of him.

"Keep your head down, Johnny. Don't stand so straight!"

"I'll be all right," Johnny panted. "You get on. I'm fine."

"Just keep that big head of yours low, that's all!"

They ran. Johnny sucked breath out and in. It felt like a fire-eater must feel when he takes a mouth of flame. The African air was burning like alcohol gas fumes. It seared your throat and your lungs.

They ran. Stumbling over lakes of pebbles and up sudden hillocks. They hadn't caught up with the contact fighting in full yet. Men were running everywhere, khaki ants scuttling over hot burned grass. Running everywhere. Johnny saw a couple of them fall down and stay down.

"Oh, they don't know how," was his comment to himself.

The stones, skittering underfoot, were just like that scatter of bright pebbles in the old dry creek at Fox River, Illinois. That sky was the Illinois sky, burned blue-back and shimmering . He thrust his wet body forward with big leaps. Green, high, broad, strangely verdant in the midst of this swelter, a hill came into his vision. Any minute now the "kids" would come yelling down side of that hill. . . .

Gun fire broke out from that hill like the rash of some flaming disease. Artillery cut loose, from behind the hill. Shells curved down in an arced wail. Where they struck they lifted the earth and gave it the bumps, the bumps, the bumps! Johnny laughed.

The thrill of it got inside Johnny Choir. His feet pounding, his ear-drums pressured by the gonging of his blood in his head, his long arms swinging easy, holding his automatic rifle—

A shell came down out of the hot sky, buried its nose thirty feet from Johnny Choir and blew outward with fire, rock, shrapnel, force.

Johnny leaped wide.

"Missed me! Missed me!"

He jumped forward, one foot pounding right after the other.

"Keep your head down, Johnny! Drop, Johnny!" Smith yelled.

Another shell. Another explosion. More shrapnel.

Only twenty-five feet away this time. Johnny felt the mighty force, wind, thrust and power of it. He shouted, "Missed again! I fooled ya! Missed again!" and ran on.

Thirty seconds later he realized he was alone. The other men had flopped on their faces to dig in, because the tanks that had protected them had to swerve and go around the hill. It was too steep for climbing with a tank. And without tank protection the men dug in. The shells were singing all around.

JOHNNY CHOIR was alone and he liked it. By Gosh, he'd capture that whole darned hill himself. If the others wanted to tag behind, then he'd have all the fun himself.

Two hundred yards ahead of him a machine-gun was nested and chattering. Noise and fire came out like the stream from a powerful garden hose. It whipped and sprayed. Richochets filled the warm, shivering air of the slope.

Choir ran. He ran, laughing. Opening his big mouth, showing his teeth, he jerked to a stop, aimed, fired, laughed, and ran on again.

Machine-guns talked. A bullet line knitted the earth together in an idiot's crochet all around Johnny.

He danced and zigzagged and ran and danced and zigzagged again. Every few seconds he'd yell, "You missed me!" or "I ducked that one!" and then he'd pound like some special kind of new tank up the slope, swinging his gun.

He stopped. He aimed. He fired.

"Bang! I gotcha!" he cried.

A German fell down in the gun nest.

He ran again. Bullets swept down in a solid, withering wall. Johnny slipped

through it, like an actor slipping through gray curtains, quiet, easy, calm.

"Missed me! Missed me, missed me! I ducked, I ducked!"

He was so far ahead of the others now that he could barely see them. Stumbling further, he fired three shots. "Gotcha! And you, and you! All three of you!"

Three Germans fell. Johnny cried out delightedly. Sweat glossed his cheeks, his blue eyes were bright, hot as the sky.

Bullets cascaded. Bullets flowed, slithered, ripped the stones over, around, about, under, behind him. He danced. He zigzagged. He laughed. He ducked.

The first German gun nest was silent. Johnny started for the second one. Way off somewhere he heard a hoarse voice shouting, "Come back, Johnny, you damn fool! Come back!" Eddie Smith's voice.

But there was so much noise he couldn't be sure.

He saw the expression on the faces of the four Germans who operated the machine-gun further up the hill. Their faces were pale under their desert tan, drawn tight and wild, their mouths open, their eyes wide.

They pointed their gun straight at him and cut loose.

"Missed me!"

An artillery shell from over the hill whistled down and landed thirty feet away.

Johnny catapulted himself. "Close! But not close enough!"

Two of the Germans broke, ran from the nest, yelling crazy words. The other two clung to the gun, white faced, pouring lead at Johnny.

Johnny shot them.

He let the other two go. He didn't want to shoot them in the back. He sat down and rested in the machine-gun nest and waited for the rest of his unit to catch up to him.

He watched the Americans pop up like jack-in-the-boxes all along the base of the hill and come running.

IN ABOUT three minutes Eddie Smith came stumbling into the nest. His face was full of the same look that the Germans had had on their faces. He yelled at Johnny. He grabbed him and pawed him and looked him over.

"Johnny!" he cried. "Johnny, you're all right, you're not hit!"

Johnny thought that was a funny thing to say. "Heck no," replied, Johnny, "I told you I'd be all right."

Smith's jaw dropped. "But I saw artillery shells drop near you, and that machine-gun fire—"

Johnny scowled. "Hey, Private Smith, look at your hand."

Ed's hand was red. Sharpnel, lodged in the wrist, had drawn a quick flow of blood.

"You should have ducked, Private Smith. Darn, I keep telling you, but you never believe me."

Eddie Smith gave him one of those looks. "You can't duck bullets, Johnny."

Johnny laughed. It was the sound of a kid laughing. The sound of a kid who knows very well the routine of war, and how it comes and goes. Johnny laughed.

"They didn't argue with me, Private Smith," he said, quietly. "None of them argued. That was funny. All the other kids used to argue about it."

"What other kids, Johnny?"

"Oh, you know. The other kids. At the creek, back home. We'd always argue as to who was shot and as to who was dead. But just now, when I said Bang, you're dead, these guys played the game right along. Not one of them argued. They didn't any of them say, "Bang, I got you first. *You're* dead!" No. They let me be the winner all the time. In the old days they used to argue so much—"

"Did they?"

"Sure."

"What was it, now, that you said to them, Johnny. Did you actually say, 'BANG, you're dead'?"

"Sure."

"And they didn't argue?"

"No. Isn't that swell of them. Next time I think it's only fair I play dead."

"No," snapped Smith. He swallowed and wiped sweat off his face. "No, don't do that, Johnny. You—you just go on like you been going." He swallowed again. "Now, about this business of your ducking those bullets, about them missing you . . ."

"Sure they did. Sure I did."

SMITH'S hands trembled.

Johnny Choir looked at him. "What's wrong, Private?"

"Nothing. Just—just excitement. And, I was just wondering."

"What?"

"Just wondering how old you are, Johnny."

"Me. I'm ten, going on eleven." Johnny stopped and flushed guiltily. "No. What's wrong with me? I'm eighteen, going on nineteen."

Johnny looked at the bodies of the German soldiers.

"Tell them to get up now, Private Smith."

"Huh?"

"Tell them to get up. They can get up now if they want to."

"Yeah, well—you see, Johnny. That is. Uh. Look, Johnny, they'll get up after we leave. Yeah, that's it. After we leave. It's against the—rules—for them to get up now. They want to rest awhile. Yeah—rest."

"Oh."

"See here, Johnny. I wanna tell you something right now!"

"What?"

Smith licked his lips and moved his feet and swallowed and cursed softly. "Oh, nothing. Nothing at all. Damn. Except that I'm envious of you. I—I wish I hadn't grown up so hard and so fast. See, Johnny, *you're* going to come out of this war. Don't ask me how, I just feel you are. That's the way the Book reads. Maybe *I* won't come out. Maybe I'm not a kid. And not being a kid maybe I won't have the protection that God gives a kid just because he is a kid. Maybe I grew up believing in the wrong things—believing in reality and things like death and bullets. Maybe I'm nuts for imagining things about you. Sure I am. Just my imagination for thinking that you're—aw. Whatever happens, Johnny, remember this, I'm going to stick by you."

"Sure you are. That's the only way I'll play," said Johnny.

"And if anybody so much as tries to tell you you can't duck bullets, you know what I'm going to do?"

"What?"

"I'm going to kick them square in the teeth!"

Eddie got up, jerking, nervous, a funny smile on his lips.

"Now, come on, Johnny, let's move and move fast. There's another—game—playing over this hill."

Johnny got excited. "Is there?"

"Yeah," said Smith. "Come on."

They went over the hill together. Johnny Choir dancing and zigzagging and laughing, and Eddie Smith following close behind, watching him with a white face and wide, envious eyes. . . .

SUPERSTITIONS

SOME AMERICAN INDIANS CONSIDERED THE RATTLESNAKE AS A SUPERIOR BEING AND TOOK GREAT PAINS NEVER TO OFFEND HIM! THE CHEROKEE REGARDED HIM AS THE CHIEF OF THE SNAKE TRIBE AND FEARED AND RESPECTED HIM ACCORDINGLY. FEW OF THEM WOULD VENTURE TO KILL A RATTLE-SNAKE UNLESS FORCED TO DO SO, AND THEN IT WAS NECESSARY TO ATONE FOR THEIR CRIME BY CRAVING PARDON OF THE SNAKE'S GHOST, EITHER THEMSELVES OR THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF A PRIEST.
IT WAS BELIEVED THAT IF THESE PRECAUTIONS WERE NEGLECTED, *THE KINSFOLK OF THE DEAD SNAKE WOULD AVENGE THE DEATH BY SENDING ONE OF THEIR NUMBER TO TRACK DOWN THE MURDERER AND* ***STING HIM TO DEATH***

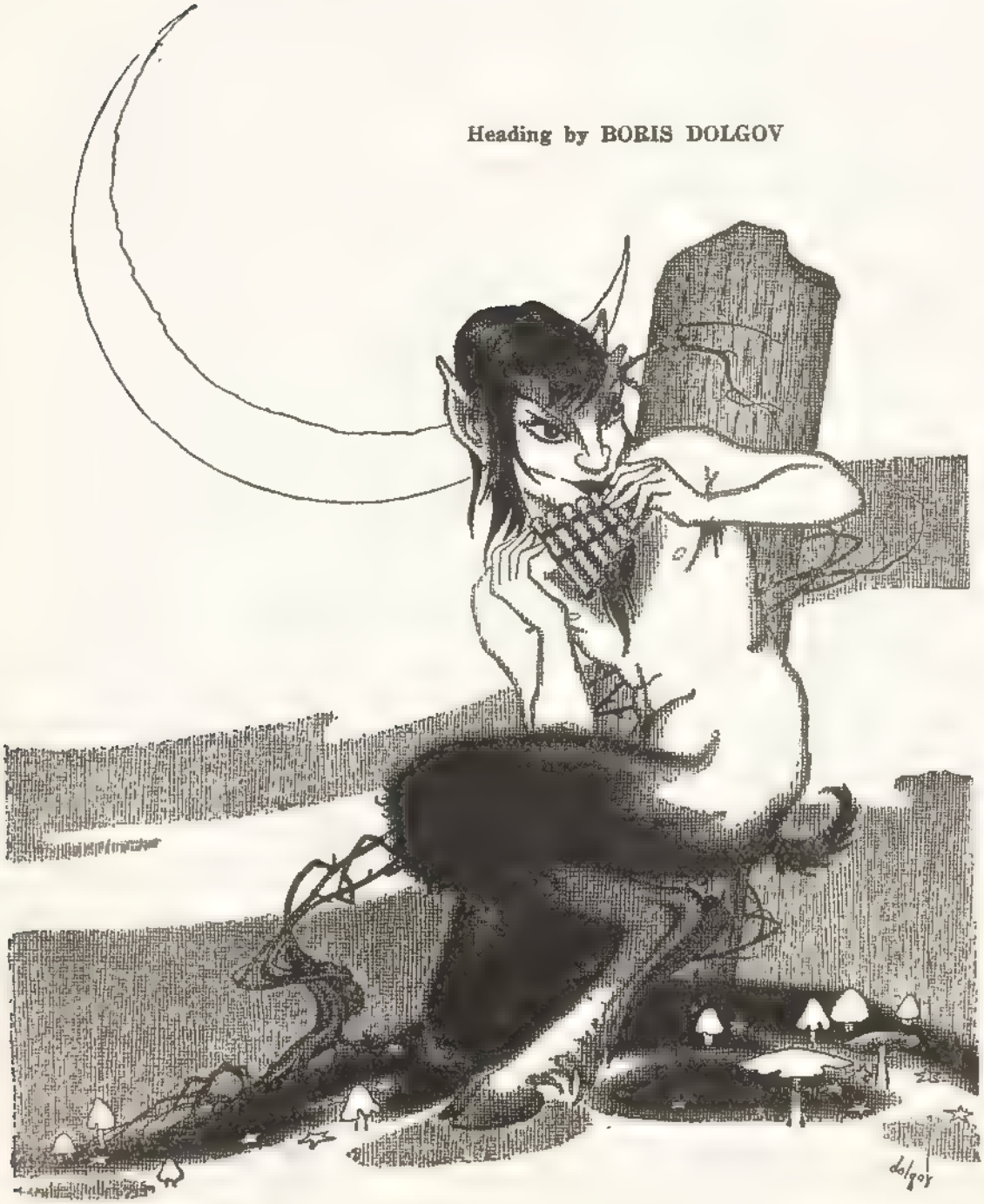
AND TABOOS by Nell

IN JAVA A POPULAR CURE FOR GOUT OR RHEUMATISM IS TO RUB SPANISH PEPPER INTO THE NAILS OF THE FINGERS AND TOES OF THE SUFFERER! THE SHARPNESS OF THE PEPPER IS SUPPOSED TO BE TOO MUCH FOR THE GOUT OR RHEUMATISM, WHICH ACCORDINGLY DEPARTS IN HASTE!

MONTEZUMA, EMPEROR OF MEXICO, **NEVER** SET FOOT ON THE GROUND! IT WAS BELIEVED THAT HIS SANCTITY WOULD BE PROFANED IF HE SO MUCH AS TOUCHED THE GROUND WITH HIS FOOT. HE WAS ALWAYS CARRIED ON THE SHOULDERS OF NOBLEMEN, AND IF HE LIGHTED ANYWHERE *RICH TAPESTRY WAS LAID FOR HIM TO WALK UPON!*

Great Pan Is Here

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV



By GREYE LA SPINA

LYING at the edge of the asphalt road just outside the gutter and far enough back so that passing car wheels could not crush it, lay a seven-reed pandean pipe. Incredible anachronism on a modern highway; I could hardly believe my eyes. It might have been dropped just before our car swung around the corner by my garden; I had an eerie feeling that the owner had dodged out of sight in the thicket of shrubbery a fraction of a minute before.

I said quickly to Cecily: "Did you see that syrinx?"

Cecily insinuated delicately that I had had one cocktail too many. Although it lay on her side of the road, she had seen nothing.

First time I'd known her to miss anything out of the ordinary.

Aunt Kate was muttering vexedly from the rear seat. I'd been of half a mind to go back and pick up that shepherd's flute just to prove to Cecily that five cocktails were well within my limit, but although I couldn't distinguish a word I knew what Aunt Kate was saying. She doesn't approve of late arrival at symphony concerts. I did hint loudly that I'd like to pick up the unusual object but she promptly blew the man down with a loud snort, adding that she didn't intend to lose the first movement of the symphony just because I'd imagined something that, having no business to be there, couldn't have been there, consequently wasn't there.

Cecily said she thought this was fairly conclusive reasoning, so between them I was dissuaded from returning. What I didn't realize then was that neither Aunt Kate, who usually drove from the back seat directing our course for every bump or puddle in the road, hadn't seen that glaring anachronism. Nor had Cecily—Cecily, who rarely misses seeing the wariest pheasant or the smallest couchant cottontail. I only, of the three of us, had seen those pipes. So we drove on, leaving the syrinx lying by the roadside. The symphony concert was, as usual, magnificent. One of the encores held undue significance for me that night; it was the piping entrance of the little fauns. It carried me completely out of myself and back to that object I had seen lying on the gravel at the turn in the road. I promised myself to watch for it and salvage it on the way home. I had a burning curiosity to handle it and an overpowering desire to lay it against my lips and sound its shrill, sweet notes.

But either the headlights—on the opposite side of the road when we returned—did not pick it out or it had already been seen and appropriated by someone else. Cecily insisted that my imagination was working overtime but I was so positive of that Pan-pipe's reality that I even remembered a fine cord attached to it, as if it had

"Here I have found tranquil peace under the same stars that light my old world, that world now closed by diabolic Man to the spirits of the woods and seas and gardens."

but recently hung about some little faun's sun-browned neck. That last touch was too much for Cecily. She told me shortly that she thought it rather silly on my part to attempt embroidering a story that was obviously only a fabrication of my too-vivid imagination. We had what is euphemistically termed "words" and Cecily flounced into the house with Aunt Kate, disdaining to complete our tentative plans for a sail next morning in the *Sprite*.

I PUT up the car and followed Aunt Kate and my charming cousin into the house, hoping that Cecily had relented and that we would have a cigarette together before retiring for the night, but the house was as still as if a chatty old lady and a lively young girl had not preceded me five minutes before my own entrance. I went to the kitchen to see if they had gone there for sandwiches and drinks but it was deserted. Those "words" had cooked my goose as far as a half-hour alone with Cecily was concerned. I sometimes feared that my aunt's strict, old-fashioned ideas had made Cecily too reserved, too cold. I had long wished ardently that something would rouse her to understand that a man in love cannot be held forever at a chilling distance.

I took some ice cubes to the library, mixed a highball, lighted a cigarette and went to the screened bay-window overlooking my sunken garden. There was a tender crescent moon hanging low in the sky with no cloud to dim the broad expanse of twinkling, starry attendants. I longed to share that beauty with Cecily. There was just enough light to make the garden an enchanted spot, high-lighted here and there against the deep shadows of the pine grove at the rear, beyond which boomed the sea. The nymph fountain I had brought from Italy sprinkled sparkling pearly spray against a background of shrubbery and farther down the graveled path I could see the sun-dial on its marble pedestal surrounded by the sheen of white flowers whose heavy fragrance hung on the night air. Aunt Kate dearly loves a white garden because it is so lovely at night and when she took over the management of my household after my parents' death, I had the white garden planted to please her.

I was just on the point of snuffing out my cigarette and going up to bed when I thought I detected a movement at the rear of the garden. I say a movement, because what I really saw I didn't actually see. I mean, what I glimpsed was an apparent disappearance of the sun-dial on its gleaming marble pedestal. It was as if some obscuring shadow had passed between it and me, blotting it momentarily from sight. I was startled because I knew neither Aunt Kate nor Cecily would be strolling out there alone. By midnight, too, the servants were abed snoring comfortably, as we rarely kept anyone up on symphony nights because it was far more fun to raid refrigerator and pantry than to call a sleepy butler or dopy-eyed maid to fetch sandwiches and drinks. Moreover, the intruder in the garden could not have been Aunt Kate or Cecily; their dresses would have shown up in the starlight. Aunt Kate had worn a light gray silk and Cecily had been in frilly dotted muslin, white as an October hoar frost, a charming cool frock for a hot summer night. Who the deuce, thought I, has taken the liberty of promenading in our garden at midnight without so much as a by-your-leave?

I took a last puff at my cigarette, crushed it out on an ash-tray, and went down the room to the French doors. Of course they were locked; Ashby would have seen to that on his nightly rounds. I unlocked them and went out on the bricked terrace and stood there quietly under the myriad stars. I sensed an inner suspense, as if something notable were about to happen. I listened, feeling that I must surely hear the sound of

feet on the shifting gravel of the path but while I watched, the sun-dial again performed its disappearing act, unaccompanied by the merest whisper of sound. It was uncanny. I wanted to call, "Who's there?" but knew that if I did I'd have my aunt out in the hall, Cecily at her window, Ashby prancing about in pajamas and quite probably cook and the maids uttering shrieks from the back stairs. So I held my peace.

A MOMENT later I was glad I had. There came a whispered stirring of shrubbery somewhere in the garden. I couldn't locate the sound but I heard it distinctly. It was an irregular rustle quite unlike the gentle urge of a night breeze. Then borne on the sweet night air sounded a series of distinct, if pianissimo, flute-like notes. As they fell upon my straining, grateful ears I stood stock-still, amazed and intrigued by what somehow seemed a mystical sequence to the syrinx lying by the roadside, the symphonic encore featuring the piping of the little fauns, the mysterious behavior of the sun-dial. The night silence pressed in upon me with a significance out of all proportion to its simple normality and in the midst of that heightened stillness, as if all Nature listened with me, I heard the notes again like drops of liquid gold and knew them for what they were. Someone had picked up that lost Pan-pipe and was trying the reeds one by one, under the magical young moon in my enchanted sunken garden.

My first sensation was one of outrage. I had wanted those pipes myself, as if they had been meant to fall into my hands. I felt that an unauthorized intruder had robbed me of something so much my own that he must have sensed it to be adding insult to injury by playing on those shepherd pipes in my garden. I was so angry that I threw aside my previous caution. I dashed down the steps from the terrace, my feet crunching over the gravel straight to the pedestal where the dial stood. Of course, as I might have realized in my noisy advance, there would be no one there when I arrived. I did imagine for a moment that the shrubbery, in the spot where it was so thickly interlaced that it seemed a tangled wildwood, stirred ever so slightly as I approached. But when I rushed up, it had already stopped its swaying and I heard no sound save the rising murmur of a night breeze that might have caused that slight agitation of the leafy branches.

I stood perfectly still and listened intently. There was not an unfriendly sound drifting on the sweet fragrance of the air. There was only the faint incessant chirping of crickets and once a birdling uttered a small smothered twitter from its nest in the crotch of one of the pines bordering the garden. I told myself I must have imagined the whole thing, conjured it up out of the enchantment of the night. Yet returning slowly to the house I wheeled about twice and faced back, for I could have sworn that someone or something was following closely behind with noiseless, airy footsteps. I was uncomfortably conscious of faint, amused disdain impingeing on my consciousness as if someone were sardonically aware of my unease and enjoyed my discomfiture.

I closed and locked the French door so quickly upon my own wary entrance that not even an invisible entity could very well have followed me inside. Then I went out to the kitchen, got more ice cubes and back in the library I fixed a whopper of a highball. I needed a bracer. I felt strongly that I had happily escaped from something faintly, but none the less obviously, inimical. Also I could not persuade myself that I had imagined those flute-like, golden notes that had fallen out of the starlit night upon my astonished, ravished ears.

By next morning Cecily had apparently forgotten her vexation. She came to breakfast looking like a rather with-

drawn young goddess in that paucity of attire girls assume for sports wear. Of course she was as beautiful as the sun, moon and stars, and I told her so. She looked at me and smiled and I knew, as I always had when she smiled at me, that even if she wanted my heart to trample, it was hers for the asking. After breakfast we strolled down to the beach with a packed luncheon basket. I keep a rowboat with an outboard motor at our private wharf near the bathing pavilions.

Cecily protested, as I started the motor: "Don't be in such a rush, Craig. Isn't that Tommy Leatherman coming down the beach?"

I'd seen him. That was why I wanted to be off. I presume I must have looked sulky for Cecily pointed one finger at me derisively, wrinkling her nice straight nose.

"Etta's in New York for the week-end and Tommy's simply forlorn, Craig. Be humane and ask him along."

"But I don't want him along," I objected. "You act as if you didn't want to be alone with me, Cecily. I like to have you to myself once in a while. Your mother's such a strict duenna, and now you want Tommy to chaperone us."

Cecily tried to look offended but failed. Her lips drew into a smile. She looked at me from under curling lashes and I was lost and she knew it.

I hailed Tom none too pleasantly. Of course he wanted to go along. Men always wanted to go along with Cecily. So that was the end of my plan for a day alone with my cousin. We climbed aboard the *Sprite* and I tied the small boat to her stern. Cecily disposed herself picturesquely where she needn't move until it was time to open the luncheon hamper. Tom sat beside her. That left me to sail the boat. Ordinarily I wouldn't have cared, for I love the wild abandon of the *Sprite* when she takes the wind in her sails and fairly flies. Aunt Kate once said that if the *Sprite* had been a girl, she would have been of the type considered "fast." I was busy with the boat and paid no attention to my passengers until I caught a few words that made me prick up my ears and almost stop what I was doing.

Tom said: "—so I went back and picked it up and it was a curious little reed instrument hanging on a brown string. It was the sort of thing nymphs and fauns used to play on, you know."

"Well!" I heard Cecily exclaim in an amazed undertone. She turned her face to me and said sweetly, "Sorry, Craig! My error."

Tom stared, brow puzzled into a scowl, but I knew she was apologizing for not having believed me when I'd told her about the Pan-pipe by the side of the road. Now she was hearing from Tom that it had been there and that he'd picked it up himself.

A strange resentment rose in me. The thing had little or no intrinsic value but it had impressed me as something closely associated with myself.

I said disgustedly: "So it was you piping in our garden last night. Rather a childish performance, Tom. You might have come in for a drink before slipping away as you did."

Tom said he didn't know what I was getting at.

"What I'm getting at is this," said I, growing a little angry at his evasion. "What possessed you to come piping in my garden on those ridiculous reeds at midnight? I heard you, Tom. Every time you paraded past the sun-dial I knew it, too."

"I was sound asleep in bed before midnight last night, Craig."

I said, "Oh, yeah?" and let it go at that. I didn't intend to get into an argument with him before Cecily; I had a feeling that she might side with him as she had with Aunt Kate the previous night.

Then she took the wind out of my sails by declaring: "But I heard the piping,

Tom. If it wasn't you, who could it have been? It was you who found the syrinx."

Tom stared at her, speechless. So did I.

"It was a very disturbing sound. It reached 'way inside me," said she in a troubled voice. "I thought it was you, Craig."

"It wasn't I. It was someone who had no business in my garden. Sure you're not a somnambulist?" I asked Tom drily.

He snapped rather disagreeably that he had already told me he was home, asleep in bed, before midnight. "I certainly wasn't making an ass of myself, prancing about your garden tootling on a silly, childish toy," he growled.

"Of course you wouldn't do anything like that," agreed Cecily warmly.

I thought, "Drat the gal," until I caught the sparkle of a sly twinkle in her eyes.

"I would like to know who was serenading," she went on, her gray eyes dark with secret thoughts. "There was something eerie about those fragile, flute-like notes. They allured and frightened me. I wanted to follow the player and yet I was so terrified that the blood ran cold in my veins. Those notes were strangely haunting."

I thought myself that they had seemed most unusual for a broken series of unlinked musical notes that carried no particular motif; they were at once plaintive and searching. It was as if someone had tried one reed after the other, moving the pipes slowly across his lips without actually playing the instrument. It was the golden quality of those notes that had made such a strong impression on me. There had been something almost magical about them as they fell with clarity on the night air. I had felt as if night and Nature had awaited those lovely sounds; that the silence had hushed to a deeper degree of summer stillness for their reception. It had sounded like the prelude to an enchanted musical rite. Magical. That was the proper word for those notes.

I ASKED Tom abruptly if he had any plans for the syrinx. He stared at me almost unpleasantly and then observed significantly that they weren't going out of his hands.

"They seem to be in demand, Craig. What with one Pan-pipe lost by the highway, and a midnight musician tuning up on another under Cecily's window at midnight, it—there's something distinctly off about the whole situation and I don't like it, if you ask me."

Cecily flicked me a warning look. She knew I was about to retort that nobody was going to ask him. I withheld my goading comment. But for the rest of the day there wasn't a moment I didn't think about that shepherd's flute and wish I'd gone back to pick it up. Cecily herself brought up the subject after we'd left Tom on the beach later that afternoon. We swung up through the back of the garden, the hamper in my right hand and Cecily's arm twined about my left arm. I got a faint impression that she was glad she was with me, and I dared to say so boldly in the absence of her usual aloofness and reserve.

Her fingers tightened on my arm. "I'm always happiest when I'm with you, Craig. Even if we're quarreling," she admitted impishly. "But I'm especially glad not to be alone today. In the garden," she explained oddly.

"Why the garden?" I quizzed, intrigued.

"Because something is here now that wasn't here yesterday, Craig. I can feel it and it terrifies me. I feel all panicky and I don't know why. Silly, isn't it?"

I didn't want her troubled, so gave a short dry laugh of incredulity.

"Oh, it isn't imagination, Craig. Truly it isn't. It is something very frightening. It came last night. After that piping. I feel it doesn't really mean to hurt—but if it has to, it won't even realize it's hurting. It will have its way at any cost to—well, to lesser creatures."

I said teasingly, "The hot sun must have affected you, darling."

She pinched my arm until I yelped at the sharp pain.

"Don't be horrid, Craig, or I'll never tell you my innermost thoughts again."

"That being a dire penalty," said I, "I'll not be horrid, for I felt something strange in the garden last night, myself. Although I must say I don't feel it in broad daylight."

And then we both stopped short where we stood at the opening of the shrubbery that gave upon the graveled path leading to the fountain; I with amazed resentment, Cecily with a sharp indrawing of breath and a pressure of her trembling body against me.

A strange, foreign looking man, who seemed at once like a seafaring person and a countryman from the back mountains, stood lean and angular between us and the sun-dial, his peaked brown face under the slouch hat complacently upon us as if he had known to the minute just when we would emerge to confront him. His jutting jaw bore a scanty, ragged beard like a he-goat's scraggly chin-whiskers. Strangely vivid eyes peered at us from under bushy brows as might canny wood creatures from their shrubby hiding-places, missing nothing—piercing my startled discomposure and Cecily's trembling apprehension as if their gaze penetrated flesh and entered unobstructedly the inner recesses of our minds. His widely curving, full-lipped mouth shaped a flickering, half-mocking smile. A kind of dark shawl draped in romantic fashion across his shoulders concealed his entire body; the fringes, trailing over the ground covered even his feet.

CECILY shrank against me, clutching feverishly at my arm as she whispered in a shaky voice: "Craig, I'm afraid. I don't know why, but I'm awfully scared. Something's terribly wrong here. That man—" she shuddered.

I pressed her clinging hand against my side with my arm and turned so that she was partly behind me.

I said sharply, "What are you doing here? Don't you know you're trespassing?"

The stranger spoke to me but his eyes were on Cecily's slender body clad in shorts and bra. "The maiden is fair," he gloated.

I shook Cecily's hand from my arm, set down the luncheon hamper, doubled up my fists and advanced toward him.

"Get out of here!" I grated, feeling my face whiten with repressed fury at his impudence.

He responded with a question. "Is this garden yours, youth?"

"The garden is mine and I'll thank you to clear out of it."

His flickering, mocking smile deepened into a more ingratiating expression. "Has your garden no welcome for its lord and master, Pan?" he inquired.

A warning tingle quivered down my spinal column at that sublime self-confidence. I heard my voice weakly echoing, "Pan?"

"I have spoken, youth. I am seeking quiet gardens in this New World where perchance a few still survive who know my name and will not fear to harken to the pipes of Pan, to the lilting notes that burn away the dross of human convention and open joyous paths of natural impulse. My groves in the Old World have been destroyed.

"Dryads and nymphs fear to follow the sound of my pipes for there is no more night since you mad, deluded human creatures began to fling Jove's thunder-bolts and lightnings over the world. This garden you call yours has its good points; not every garden borders upon Neptune's domain. I need your garden, youth."

Sudden unreasoning, unwelcome panic seized upon me. I felt gooseflesh pricking my skin. Was the man mad? Or was I? His words seemed to mingle the vaporings

of a deluded lunatic and the reasonable expression of sanity.

The stranger continued after a brief pause, his piercing eyes still upon Cecily.

"Be not afraid, youth. You and this maiden have come part way to my worship, since you do not cover your bodies with the ugly garments I have seen in your cities. Give me, then, the freedom of this fair garden and the word of release for my dancing nymph."

One long hairy arm pushed out from under the clumsy drapery and a finger pointed.

Cecily and I exchanged a quick glance of wary puzzlement. That finger drew our eyes to the marble fountain we had had so much trouble bringing back with us from Italy on our last trip there before the global war.

We knew it had been dug up from the foundations of an ancient temple near Girgenti in Sicily. Had the Italian authorities known this, we could not have brought the marble to America, hence it had been billed to us by the finder as a copy only. Perhaps because it had cost us so much trouble, as well as because of its beauty, I valued my nymph fountain greatly.

It was a lovely thing in the trailing shadow of that late afternoon, but at night it was the center of my sunken garden's enchantment. The nymph's delicate figure was exposed where scant drapery did not swirl from one shoulder to dimpled knees. Above flying locks she held a large scallop-shell into which splashed sparkling jets of crystal clear spring water from an opening in the rugged marble rock behind her. The water splashed from the shell over her body so that at times the flowing radiance created an illusion of movement as if the laughing girl were alive.

Said the strange being confronting us: "More than once she had danced down from her pedestal when I piped in the temple grove at Girgenti. Too long has she lain under the earth. It is time she danced again."

His vibrant voice was so akin to the soughing of early night breezes, twittering of sleepy birds, chuckles and squeaks of wee woodland creatures, that I was obliged to admit that I was in the presence of something alien to modern human experience, something about which my flying conjectures could tell me nothing as yet.

"Give me the freedom of your garden, good youth. You shall not regret it. Pan knows what your soul desires and will grant your wish."

"And if I refuse?" I muttered, unable to free myself from the spell of that potent personality.

"I have the power to summon this maid if I so choose. You would not like that," he said knowingly.

Cecily's hand clutched at my shirt from where she stood behind me. I sensed her panicky terror and apprehension, and summoned my courage and good-sense; or so I thought it for the moment.

"The maiden," I said boldly, "is mine. As is that nymph. Now will you kindly get off my property? I don't know who you are and I like neither your silly masquerade nor your words and attitude."

THE brown face with its wipsy beard lowered upon me. The narrowed eyes seemed to emit fiery sparks. In that moment *he* made me know. . . . There was indeed something in my garden and it was not a purely impersonal power. If I attempted to thwart that strange being's designs, he would crush me and my abortively launched obstacles ruthlessly. I knew deep within myself, suddenly, that he was tentatively, not actively, inimical, but that his power was far beyond my wildest imaginings.

"So the nymph is yours, youth, because to one who could never have owned her you gave your stupid gold? Have you paid

gold for this maiden you call yours?" His full-lipped smile deepened. "I can offer more than a mortal's gold, youth. A god can offer his worshipers far more than they can dream. Your maiden may prefer a god to a mortal. Ask *her;* she knows."

That long finger pointed again to the marble nymph. I cursed my too-vivid imagination that made me seem to see her laughing lips curl mockingly.

"In America we do not buy maids with gold," I cried angrily in an outburst of daring.

"With what did you buy your maid, that you can call her yours?"

"I—we exchanged our love," I muttered. "Then we belong to each other."

PAN regarded me with what I felt was a kindly expression, for the blaze left his eyes and a momentary tenderness lurked within them.

"That is well," he said. "I like that in the New World. It is indeed very well. So the maiden has given you her love?" he probed with sly interest.

I felt misgivings. As yet I had not dared tell Cecily of my love in so many words and I feared that the bold declaration I had just made might tempt her into feminine contradiction. There was silence for a moment; then Cecily's voice murmured from behind me.

"Yes," it said softly. "Oh, yes!"

I turned and whipped her into my arms. "Darling," I whispered.

Something very human flickered over my strange visitor's face and I knew that he understood perfectly that Cecily and I had never before plighted our troth but that he was permitting us to believe we had fooled him.

"Tonight is Midsummer Eve, youth," he said abruptly.

From Cecily's golden head that rested against my heart I turned my uncomprehending gaze although his words brought vague recollections of childhood tales and superstitions.

"I marvel that your silly doctrines have not taught you that on this night all hidden powers above and below are loosened, youth. Alas, to be so ignorant and so blind!"

I remembered then that the morrow was Midsummer Day, the 23rd of June.

"Because I am in a strange new land where hitherto the gods have not foregathered because no worshippers called them, I must take advantage of every favorable circumstance, youth. Tonight I may best do this, in all the year. Here also have I found my playmate nymph in your sunken garden. I have found here wide spreads of grassy sward and a sheltered pine grove for my dryads. Here, too, I have found tranquil peace under the same stars that lighted my old world, that world now closed by diabolic Man to the spirits of the woods and seas and gardens."

I listened, amazed and understanding. Cecily clung to me and I knew that all I wanted was the knowledge of her security in my arms.

"You fear lest an olden god take your maid from you, youth? Give me your sunken garden and your green lawns and your pine grove, and my lonely nymph, and the maid remains yours if such is her choice."

Cecily's trembling body pressed closer to me. "Give him anything," she breathed. "but do not let him call me on his pipes for I fear him greatly. Nature can be relentlessly cruel, Craig, and Pan is the god of Nature."

"Although by now you must have admitted my identity, I offer yet further credentials than those in your own heart," offered the stranger and lifted the slouch hat from his straggling black locks, that tumbled over his forehead in wild confusion. His eyes never left mine as his hand brushed away that concealing hair from the small,

polished black horns they had hidden. The incredulous truth gripped me with power beyond my will to believe.

"Name me!" said the brown man, his lips parting in a smile that mocked elfishly.

He moved ever so slightly. The fringes trailing about his feet parted; I saw that which was not a human foot. One hand half drew from his bosom the very syrinx, I could have sworn, that I had seen and Tom Leatherman had salvaged; it hung suspended by a brown cord from his neck.

I said hoarsely, "So you found the syrinx. Pan! You are Pan!"

"You believe?"

"I believe," I groaned unwillingly for my head spun with the tremendous truth.

"Bid the maiden leave us," he commanded.

In obedience to my urgent whisper, Cecily left the refuge of my arms and fled up the garden path to the house. I watched her go in at one of the French doors.

I could no longer refuse to believe the evidence of my senses that an Immortal deigned to visit my garden, incredible though it might seem. I might be unwilling, but I knew I dared not refuse to an Immortal whatsoever he asked. Resentment gnawed at me as I humbly waited for Pan to state his demands.

"The garden will be yours under the sun, youth, but at night it must be mine alone until such time as I may find another better suited to my purpose. Tonight my brother gods will lend me their aid and I shall pipe to those dryads and nymphs in the Old World who loved me best and they shall come tonight to the New World to people the pine grove with little fauns and to worship Pan once more as in days agone. The nymph you have called yours shall live again under the stars tonight. And if perchance your newly-betrothed maiden dares share her rapturous moments with a god, she may enter my garden unafraid. As may you, youth, if you can worship Pan."

I said in a choked voice that henceforth the garden would be closed to everyone at night.

With a lift of busy eyebrows and a sly quirk of full red lips Pan said, "Save to the maid, if she regret her present choice."

HE THREW back his head, laughed, and nimbly stepped past me to the thick shrubbery and there in broad daylight he went out to it as it went out to him. He had gone into nothingness while I stared stupidly at the spot where he had melted before my eyes.

I ran up to the house, thankful to get away from my now haunted garden. Cecily met me as I reached the terrace.

"Craig, who and what is he? He is no common man. He is god-like and diabolical at once. He allures and terrifies me."

I was glad that the telephone interrupted at this moment and I went inside to answer it. Tom Leatherman's voice asked me brusquely if I'd been to his house; he'd missed the syrinx. I said the owner had seen it and taken it. Then I hung up on Tom's questionings.

"The owner?" asked Cecily pointedly.

I took her in my arms and told her what I had seen and heard and promised and believed in spite of myself.

"I knew it, Craig. It does sound incredible, but I knew he was not a real man. A god in our garden! Incredible."

"Cecily, our visitor *is* a god from the Old World. I have to believe it. I don't want to, and I don't like the situation, but I have to believe it or consider myself quite mad. Look, darling, he can do things. . . . Do you realize that I've been trying for months to get up courage to tell you I loved you? He made me say it."

I shook her gently and held her from me that I might search her face. Had she feigned her confession of love?

"Cecily, did you really mean that you love me?"

She came back into my arms with a naturalness that I had never quite hoped to see from her, in whom spontaneous impulse had been so carefully pruned away by her mother's prim ideas.

"Craig, Mother has always told me I mustn't act on impulse. I've always been afraid to let myself go," she admitted. "But I couldn't pretend before *him*."

I said to myself, Pan was indeed a potent god. In his presence Cecily's inherited and carefully nourished ideas of prudery had died and her heart wakened to simple, natural impulse. My heart cried "Evohe, Pan!" as intuition told me my recognition of Pan's power was worship and that I was helping establish himself in America by my very gratitude. I held Cecily so that her heart beat against mine. Let it be worship, I told myself joyfully.

We agreed that we would watch the garden in secret that very night. As in most psychic experience, we needed more convincing evidence than we had already received. Aunt Kate was to be told nothing; she would not have believed had we told her. She might even consider us deranged, and forbid the engagement we planned to announce that night at dinner. It was a bit of good fortune that Aunt Kate's room was in an opposite wing from the sunken garden, although whether or not her stodgy materialism would enable her to see, hear, or even sense, anything unusual was questionable.

Ashby opened champagne by my special order after dinner. Aunt Kate seemed well pleased at the announcement of Cecily's engagement to me and even gave Cecily permission to stroll in the garden in my company without chaperonage. We did not take advantage of this rare liberty but retired to a corner of the living room by ourselves after dinner. Aunt Kate played solitaire until almost midnight, when to our vast relief she yawned widely, shuffled the cards into a neat pile and put them in the case.

She said as she rose, that even engaged young people should not be sitting around alone and bade Cecily say good night to me in ten minutes. Cecily looked at me archly and laughed softly, and the moment her mother disappeared from the room, the two of us hid behind the heavy velvet drapes at one of the library windows where we could observe what went on in the garden without ourselves being seen. We sat close together, hand in hand, and waited.

THE night was still with that country quiet so full of sound. Crickets and sleepy birds and an owlet's mournful hoo-hoo-hooing made a normal background that yet held something of strange magic on that mystic Midsummer Night's Eve. I was conscious of these small night sounds without actually hearing them. The luminous hands of the library clock marked midnight and the bells chimed the hour. As they ceased, Cecily and I were so aware suddenly that something had changed, that something more than simple nature—above it, beyond it, yet containing it in some mysterious way—had come into the garden, that our hands tightened involuntarily.

A low, sweet note swung out upon the waiting night, to be followed by others that dropped into a silence hollowed to receive them. Nature, become receptive, withheld those night sounds that had filled space, and drew into her yearning heart all the golden beauty that dropped generously from the pipes of Pan. Her patron god was abroad that night and well my garden knew it.

Cecily whispered, "Craig, I am not afraid any more. Pan calls tonight for love and laughter."

I clung to her hand then, for it was I who was afraid, not for myself but for her.

"Craig! The marble nymph! Look!"

The delicate notes followed each other like individual entities into the waiting silence like fays sporting from flowering spray to spray. Cecily stood up so that I must stand with her, since our fingers were tightly interlaced. She was listening with her head tilted to one side, exactly as the nymph had stood beneath the crystal spray of the fountain. I followed her gaze as she listened with almost painful intensity and I could not smother a low exclamation at what I saw.

The nymph no longer held the scalloped shell above her head; the shell lay on the base of the pedestal. The nymph was dancing down the garden like a wild woman in a Bacchic orgy. The gleaming snowy marble of her body moved with the freedom of living flesh. Her scanty drapery drifted in the air where she held it high above her head like a triumphal banner as she drifted, rather than danced, across the shadowy lawn under the stars.

A series of brief notes with strange intervals lilted upward to my ears. Cecily jerked her fingers from mine. I had felt the pull of that bold theme as well as she but I tried to restrain her, fearing as I did that Immortal who waited without.

"Let me go, Craig, my dearest. Do you hear that call? I am going to dance all night on the soft green grass. Are you coming? Come, come! If you do not, I must dance with *him*. Oh, dance with me, dearest!"

ECSTASY tingled in every passionate intonation of her joyous voice. I tried to seize her but she evaded me, laughing. As she ran, I followed, but she reached the French doors, which she flung wide before I could reach her side. I followed along a trail of draperies she discarded as she ran, and flung one way and the other carelessly. Before me, far lovelier than my wildest dreams could have imagined. Cecily's gleaming arms and throat shone like silver under the soft rays of the moon.

"Evohe, Pan, great Pan!" her voice floated back to me as she flitted past the strange god who stood piping before the sun-dial, no more disguised as an ordinary mortal.

The brown torso rose from hairy hips and thighs. His narrow dark face with wisp-like beard never left off following the two white figures dancing with abandon under the moon. Once, after a long roulade of thrilling enchantment, he dropped the syrinx from his lips, threw back his head and rocked with silent laughter. For all his alert attention, he was never still for a moment. Those goat-feet tripped lightly to and fro in time to the underlying rhythm of his piping and the unruly black hair tossed above pointed ears and little polished horns.

I approached that strange god without fear, sensing no antagonism toward me. As I approached, he took the reed-pipe from his red lips and called in friendly fashion.

"You leave your maiden to dance alone, youth? Do you not see that for the first time in her poor mortal experience she has become her natural self, uninhibited by silly conventions and prudish teachings? Go, fool. Dance with her. Else must she dance with a god and be lost to you forever."

Thereupon the piping became eldritch and maddening. I found myself leaping across the greensward in great bounds, and I sprang to Cecily's side, seizing upon the hand she extended. "Evohe, Pan!" I shouted madly as we danced and played across the lawn, while the clear moon and twinkling stars poured their rays full of the vital laughter of life upon our bodies abandoned to the ecstasy of that mad dance.

The music of the Pan-pipes went on and on and on and it seemed that our dance need never come to an end. The garden

was full of piping sound, chanting voices, soft laughter. Mysterious Others joined us, as if the dryads and nymphs of the Old World were drifting into my sunken garden in joyous groups. We swung across the grass in long lines, hand in hand, to the melodious magic of Pan's weird music.

Then . . . a sudden, abrupt silence. The golden notes were still. Only the dark pine grove seemed alive as it never had been before, endued with a livingness akin to, but apart from, the trees. Across the lawn the marble nymph flitted. I saw her spring lightly to the pedestal of the fountain and lean over to pick up the scallop-shell. She flung her disheveled garment carelessly across her shoulder. No shaggy-thighed Immortal tripped nimbly to and fro on cloven hoofs before the sun-dial, piping unendurably alluring enchantments.

Cecily's grasp on my fingers relaxed. Her body slipped down at my feet. The faint, luminous dawn touched her skin with rosy highlights. With the amazed mortification overcoming me as one who in a nightmare finds himself unclothed on a busy city street, I had a sensation as if I stood naked under the retiring stars. I knelt beside the girl who had danced with me since midnight with such mad abandon; her heart beat steadily but lightly. I knew she should be inside the house and safe in bed.

I lifted her in my arms and carried her there, kissing her lips as I laid her down and drew the silken sheet over her beautiful body. Then I slipped away, lest her mother waken and find me in Cecily's room, and throw upon my sweetheart the vile suspicions of a so-called pure mind.

I WONDERED what conflict would arise in Cecily in the morning, between inherited and tutored tendencies, and the simplicity and naturalness of her behavior under the influence of Pan's piping. I wondered how I could spare her blushes and, to speak truth, my own. But at breakfast that midsummer morn Cecily met my eyes across the table with an entire absence of self-consciousness. I felt almost regretful, because it seemed that she must have thought last night a dream known only to herself, and I—I cherished the memory.

Aunt Kate remarked, as she poured my coffee, that Ashby had reported a change in the posture of the marble nymph. "This being utterly absurd," said she, "I felt that he must have had something to drink. When I accused him, he was most resentful. He said the statue's scarf, or whatever it is she seems to wear so raffishly, is hanging half off her shoulder."

"Isn't half a scarf better than none?" Cecily asked demurely and her eyes met mine clear and sweet, although the loveliest of blushes tinged her cheeks.

"I am still of the opinion that it is ridiculous for Ashby to insist that a marble statue has changed in any way," Aunt Kate retorted. "I'll take a look myself after breakfast."

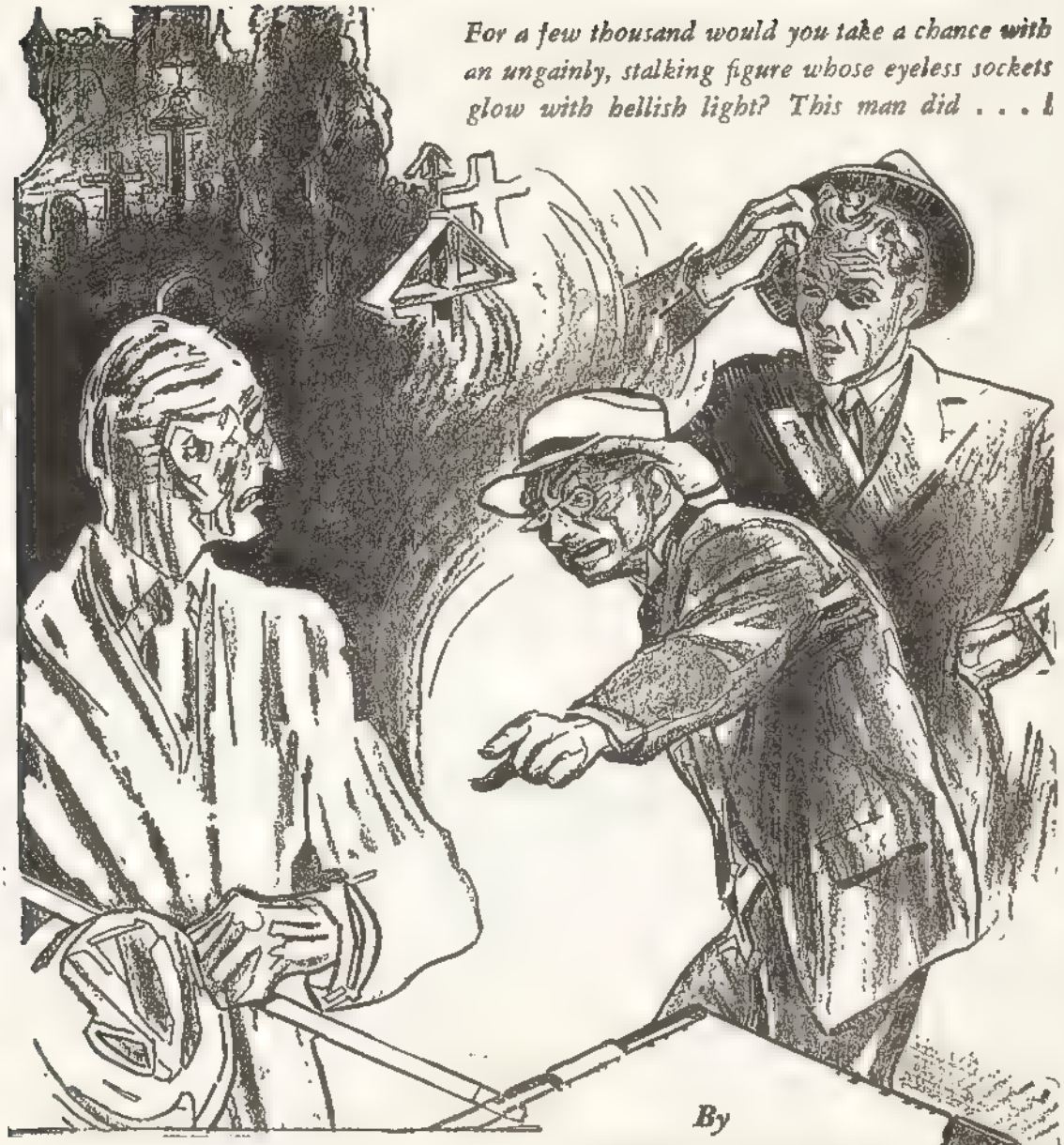
A tightness about her lips told me that Ashby would be in for a bawling-out if Aunt Kate noticed nothing different and scraped up the first excuse that occurred to me since I felt one must be made sooner or later.

"I sold the marble nymph," said I. "She cost too much and I got a fat profit on the deal. I had a plastic copy made. They tell me the plastic is affected by moonlight," I explained. "It will probably seem to change slightly from time to time. Interesting, isn't it?"

Aunt Kate looked a trifle blank but Cecily broke into a gale of laughter.

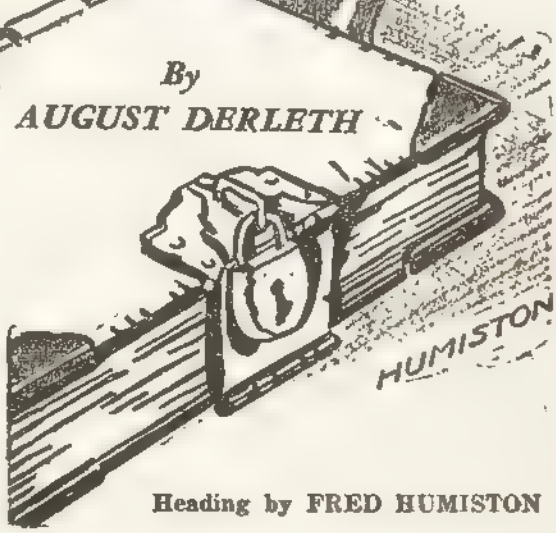
I thought I heard a delicate roulade of echoing laughter drift to my ears from the sunken garden.

For a few thousand would you take a chance with an ungainly, stalking figure whose eyeless sockets glow with hellish light? This man did . . .!



By
AUGUST DERLETH

A Thin Gentleman With Gloves



Heading by FRED HUMISTON

AT FIRST glance you would have thought Corbin Bellaman an old duffer who had long ago run to seed. At second, you would have considered him a benign and harmless fellow

who was somebody's grandfather. As a matter of fact, Bellaman was distinctly on the shady side; he was a crafty barrister in his late fifties who had for better than twenty years been the last resort of fences, petty thieves, murderers, embezzlers, and eccentrics—like Alonzo Potter. Bellaman had done very well for himself in those two decades plus, but Alonzo Potter was his downfall. Not at all in the way one might suspect, however. He got along very well with Alonzo alive; but Alonzo dead was a different matter entirely.

Alonzo Potter, almost alone among Bellaman's clients, was not a crook. That is to say, he was not obviously one; the fact is, no one knew very much about him, except that he had once written a book which a great many people had burned with a lot of public and private to-do, since it was a book purporting to tell the secrets of black magic, necromancy, sorcery, and the like. At the time Bellaman first knew his client, Potter was already an old man, a wizened, stooped figure of a man who got around with the aid of a cane, and was never without a tall, gangling companion, who walked a little behind him and to one side, like a mendicant, holding his head bowed and saying nothing. This might have occasioned considerable comment if Potter had gone out much but he did not; he kept to his out-of-the-way house in Soho, living quietly, despite the queer stories that got around about strange happenings in his house, and eventually dying quietly, leaving Bellaman to execute his will, which revealed that there was a little matter of fifty thousand pounds to be bestowed upon Miss Clarice Tregardis, an old flame of Potter's.

Despite his dealings with the underworld, Bellaman had never in his life seen fifty thousand pounds all in one lump, and the prospect of having so much money under his control was an exciting one. However, it was not until he had seen Miss Clarice Tregardis that any thought of appropriating the money entered his head. He had supposed that Miss Tregardis was most likely a chorus girl with a dubious past and a questionable present; but when she came to his office in response to his request, she turned out to be a pleasant old lady who was rather vague about the reason she had been sent for, and remembered Potter as an unsuccessful suitor—"A nice boy, to be sure, Mr. Bellaman, and for a long time we were very dear friends, *very dear*—but, time and events! Well, you know how it is, I'm sure, Mr. Bellaman."

"Well, he's left you all his money, Miss Tregardis," said Bellaman.

"Dear me! How surprising! But then, he always used to do such queer things! Is it very much?"

IT WAS then that the idea of appropriating some of Potter's money for his own use occurred to Bellaman; he had been telling himself all along that he would charge a nice fat fee for acting as executor of the will; but now he realized that Miss Tregardis had no idea at all how much Potter might have left, and, since she was obviously in poor circumstances, virtually any sum at all would be satisfactory. A chorus girl might have raised an immediate outcry and demanded to see the papers, but this old lady would be only too happy to leave it all in Bellaman's hands and take whatever he cared to hand out to her.

"The exact sum hasn't been computed as yet, Miss Tregardis," said Bellaman cautiously, "but when the tax to the Crown has been deducted, I have no doubt it will leave you fairly comfortable for a while."

That was putting it nicely, he thought.

"Oh, really!" she said. "Then perhaps I could buy myself a few new dresses, and a coat, and perhaps I could even have my apartment refurnished. Yes, perhaps I could!"

"I think you could," agreed Bellaman—she might as well be assured of that much; it would not take a large percentage of the total sum left in his predatory hands. "Would you care to retain legal representation, Miss Tregardis, or are you content to leave the matter in my hands?"

"Oh, if Alonzo trusted you, I'm sure I can, too," she said naively, and departed.

Bellaman had not expected it to be that easy.

He set about laying his plans at once. Of course, he did not intend to take any unnecessary chances; the old lady might like as not have some inquisitive relative who might poke his nose into the affair and demand a full accounting; so, to take care of any such contingency, Bellaman determined to rig up dummy papers and a plausible account of doctored expenses in connection with the disposal of the money for anyone to see on demand. He toyed with the idea of just decamping with the entire sum, but then there would be the tax collectors for the Crown, and besides, he was comfortable where he was, and there was no need of leaving his routine or his business, which was drawn largely from Whitechapel, Limehouse, Soho, and Wapping along the Thames; more unsavory areas of London could hardly be imagined.

His plans were laid with the care of an old master.

HE began by abstracting a modest sum —a thousand pounds—with which to play the races; he did this with the idea that if he could make a goodly sum by so doing, he need not deduct as much as he had planned from Potter's hoard. Gambling was Bellaman's weakness; he might have been the owner of a comfortable nest-egg if he had not insisted upon trying to double or triple every fee he took in, with the result that he was constantly living from hand to mouth.

He lost the thousand pounds.

Moreover, he had a most disagreeable experience at the races. Just after he had placed his money, he fancied that someone tapped him on the shoulder, and, turning around to look, he did not immediately see anyone he knew; but then, saw, standing a little distance away, a tall, thin gentleman wearing a bowler hat not unlike that Alonzo Potter had worn, and with a certain familiarity about him. He turned away, wondering where he could have seen him before; but in a flash he remembered. It was the silent companion who had always appeared with Potter, and who had vanished completely on the day that Potter was found dead. He looked back, but the fellow had gone. The disagreeable aspect of this trivial event lay not in the event itself but in the uncomfortable twinge it gave to his vestigial conscience, particularly after he had lost the money.

Before he dipped further into Potter's funds, he determined to conduct an inquiry into the identity of Potter's one-time companion, to discover for himself whether he might have any knowledge which could be brought to the attention of Clarice Tregardis.

He worked at it for a week, utilizing every source of underworld information that was his.

At the end of that time he was not one whit better informed than he had been before. No one knew anything whatever about Potter's companion save that he was never known to speak, no one had ever seen his face, the fellow habitually wore gloves, he was thin to emaciation, and he shuffled along after Potter more like a dog than a fellow human being. That he had disappeared completely after Potter's death, everyone was agreed. While the lack of information annoyed Bellaman, nevertheless, the unanimity of opinion about the fellow's disappearance was reassuring.

He closed the incident by coming to the conclusion that he had mistaken someone else for the cadaverous companion of Alonzo Potter.

After the lapse of a week, he tried the races once more, this time with two thousand pounds, in that sublime confidence which always obsesses the gambler and leads him to believe that he can recoup previous losses as if by a magic windfall, convincing him each time he ventures anew that his luck must turn by that mythical law of chance, and that this is the time.

But this was not Bellaman's time. Far from it.

He lost not only Potter's two thousand, but also ten and six of his own. Moreover, all the way back to his office he could not shake himself of the conviction that he was being followed. Naturally, being guilty of such pecadillos, he imagined that the police might be keeping an eye on him, and kept looking for anything resembling an officer; but of course, the ludicrousness of this presently impressed him, and his range of vision became more general. It was then that he saw the thin man, with his gangling arms and his gloved fingers, shuffling along as unobtrusively as passible half a block behind him.

HE stopped the first passerby to whom he came, caught him by the arm, and said, "Pardon me. I've lost my glasses, and I've been expecting a friend. He's a tall, thin fellow, who shuffles along, wears gloves, holds his head down so that his face is practically invisible. I thought I heard him behind me, but I can't see well enough to be sure. Is there anyone fitting that description walking along behind me?"

After a moment of careful scrutiny, the passerby, looking askance at Bellaman, as if the barrister had been drinking, assured him that there was no one even remotely answering that description in sight.

His forehead beaded with cold perspiration. Bellaman went directly to his office and took out Potter's will, thinking that perhaps he might have missed some reference to that mysterious companion in it, and hoping against hope that he would discover it without delay.

He did.

"As for Simeon Brown, who has been my constant companion for several years, he shall be considered released from the bondage I have put upon him, when the terms of this will shall have been carried out."

"That was all, nothing more. After he had read it a dozen times, Bellaman was more mystified than ever. No matter how one looked at it, it did not make sense. What bondage? How could the dead Potter exercise any choice in the matter of "releasing" Simeon Brown—the thin gentleman with gloves who had manifested himself so curiously on these two occasions? No, the whole thing was fantastic.

All except the thin gentleman with gloves—Simeon Brown. Bellaman might have made a mistake the first time, but not the second. Bellaman was no fool. Clearly, there was more to this than met the eye. With a vague sense of uneasiness, the barrister laid his plans to go away for a while—in the company of as much of Miss Tregardis's legacy as he could make away with.

He paid the tax to the Crown, made out a preposterous bill, and converted certain of his own securities into more cash—just in case he should take it into his head not to come back at all. Then he prepared, when the time was ripe, to send a check for a thousand pounds to Miss Tregardis, supremely confident that she would be completely satisfied with this amount in lieu of what, unknown to her, she had coming.

However, he reasoned, before he did anything rash, there would be no harm in

looking into the matter of Simeon Brown. Since that last disturbing glimpse of him hurrying down the street in his wake, Bellaman had seen nothing more of him; he did not connect with this fact the incident that he had kept his hands off Potter's money throughout this time.

He pursued a careful inquiry, investigating Potter's papers to the last of them. He came upon a great many extremely strange references to subjects which Bellaman thought properly belonged in the Middle Ages, when people still had a healthy respect and fear for witches, warlocks, and the like, and when spells and enchantments and potions were the order of the day. Curious, how old recluses, male and female, seemed to go in for spiritualism, table-rappings, ouija, and the like.

THE late Mr. Potter's activities, however, did not come under any one of these heads.

He had been a warlock; in his modest way, he had been a good warlock. He knew how to adapt even the most difficult of the old spells to his own uses; and he had left behind him a great many of these old spells, most of them in Latin, so that Bellaman did not take the trouble to decipher them. However, it was among them that Bellaman caught sight of the name of Simeon Brown, and after it, what appeared to be an address: 37, 213 *Upper Leshaway*. At least, that is what it appeared to be; Bellaman could not be sure, for Potter's writing was spidery and small and not very certain. There was nothing else.

And even this turned out to be a false lead, Bellamy thought, when he tracked down the address, for 213 Upper Leshaway was not a house address at all, but the number on the gate post of a cemetery. Obviously Potter's script had been beyond Bellaman. There was a Latterby Lane, and there was also a Leshly Street—it might have been one of those; but both were at such a distance from his office that Bellaman was loathe to go there.

However, before taking his final drastic step, he made caerful note of his findings, together with his suppositions as to where he had made a mistake, and set out for a meeting with three of his old cronies, two of whom were medical men of a sort and had known the late Potter. With a directness singular for him, he told them about his experiences with Simeon Brown.

Peter Benfield, who was the oldest among them, opined that this may have been the same Brown with whom Potter had once had so much trouble.

"No, Sim died years ago," offered Pearson.

Benfield smiled oddly, and turned to Bellaman. "You know, Bellaman—you might be dealing with Potter's familiar."

The others took up the theme at once, making sport of the barrister. There was no doubt of it, they averred, with many a wink and sly joke, Bellaman was being hounded by Potter's familiar. Stung, Bellaman suggested that someone might explain the meaning of the jest which was amusing them at his expense.

"Oh," said Benfield, "a familiar was just halfpenny magic for an old wizard like Potter. A familiar was a companion summoned from outside somewhere, to attend the wizard and obey his commands. A spell was put upon him by the wizard—if you went in for that sort of thing."

"A ghost?" asked Bellaman, with a poor attempt at concealing his ire at his companions.

"Well, I don't think I'd call it a ghost exactly," conceded Benfield. "But then, it might be that—or a skeleton, an imp, maybe even a corpse."

He cackled mirthlessly, much to Bellaman's disgust, so that the barrister did not know whether Penfield was joking or not. Wouldn't it have been just like old Potter, Benfield went on, to command

Simeon Brown? It certainly would. But Pearson, who had a literal mind, reflected again that poor Brown had passed on some years ago.

INSTEAD of clarifying the matter, it seemed that Bellaman only got himself more perplexed. This was annoying to a man of his calibre, and it was inevitable that he should chuck the whole thing and go ahead with his plan.

The tax to the Crown had been straightforward enough.

The carefully doctored bill, preposterous as it was, Bellaman put into his files, for any curious person to see if any kind of investigation should follow in the wake of his absence from his usual haunts.

Then he dispatched the check by the late post, and that evening he set out for Paddington to entrain for Aldershot, from whence he would cross the Channel and lose himself somewhere in France or Switzerland.

Alas! for plans of mice and men!

Bellaman had scarcely stepped from the building which housed his office when he was conscious of someone walking along behind him. It was a dark night, and he was not at first listening, being busy with a reconsideration of his plans; only when he had passed the streetlight did he become aware of the fact that the sounds coming along behind him were rather a steadily mounting shuffling than orthodox footsteps. He looked back.

It was the thin gentleman with gloves!

A kind of panic seized Bellaman. He did not for an instant believe anything of the conversation he had had with Benfield and Pearson, but there was undeniably something uncanny about the appearance of old Potter's companion at moments such as this. He felt frantically for the money which he carried in a stout wallet on the inside pocket of his coat; it was safe, for it bulked large there and filled his questing hand. He increased his pace, his agile mind concerned now with some way of escape from Potter's companion.

There was an alley which led out into a brightly lit street where he might take the subway to the Praed Street station; it was a short cut, and by vanishing into its dark maw, Bellaman's chance of outdistancing his pursuer was much greater. Accordingly, he slipped across the street, keeping to the shadows, and, at the appropriate moment, he darted skilfully into the alley.

If he had had the proper kind of imagination, he would have thought twice about doing what he did. His foresight, however, was limited, and when first he heard the shuffling sound behind him, he was only annoyed that the fellow had seen him enter the alley. Then he was conscious of the increased pace of his pursuer; indeed, all within an instant, it seemed, the fellow was directly behind him.

Could it be?

He turned, startled, and looked back.

Out of the alley's darkness came a pair of long thin arms reaching for him with gloved fingers, and behind it came an utterly horrible, soul-searing travesty of a face, whose eyeless sockets seemed to gleam with a hellish light, whose lipless mouth seemed to work in drooling ecstasy.

Bellaman did not have time to scream.

In the morning Miss Clarice Tregardis received Mr. Bellaman's check for a thousand pounds; there was also in her mailbox a well-filled wallet, the contents of which, added to the check, made up the precise sum which Miss Tregardis was legally entitled to receive from Mr. Potter's fifty-thousand pound legacy, minus the tax to the Crown.

BELLAMAN'S disappearance was more than a nine day wonder.

The police ultimately got around to dis-

covering that address he had written down and went out to investigate. Being possessed of far more imagination than the late Mr. Bellaman, they proceeded at once to the Upper Leshaway cemetery, and went directly to lot thirty-seven, which presumably had been meant.

So it had. Lot thirty-seven held the grave of one Simeon Brown. Moreover, there was evidence that the grave had been recently disturbed; so an exhumation order was got and the grave opened.

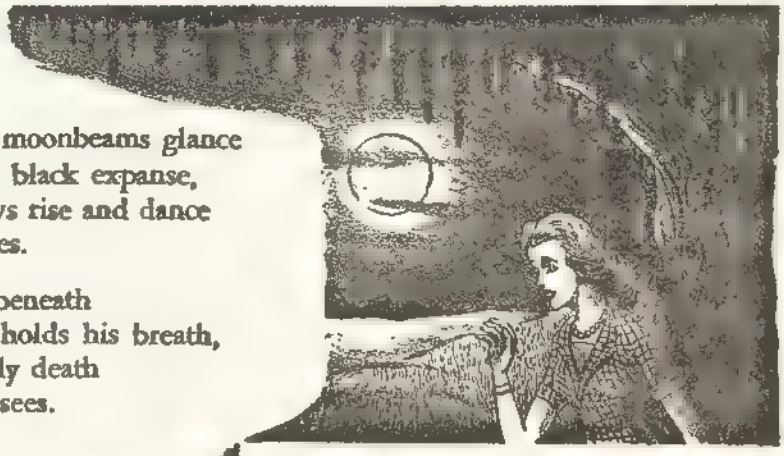
The grave contained the body of Corbin Bellaman, who had been strangled and otherwise badly mauled, together with the remains of the said Brown, badly decayed and partly skeletal, a tall, thin gentleman apparently, whose bony black-gloved fingers were curiously closed about Bellaman's neck.

It was a ghastly business, even for Scotland Yard. They issued a strongly worded statement in regard to the shocking vandalism accompanying the murder of the late Corbin Bellaman and hinted ominously that the entire mystery would soon be completely explained by the master minds behind the walls of that sacrosanct sanctuary of mysteries.

But, of course, it never was.

On Lake Lagore

By DOROTHY GOLD



ON Lake Lagore, when moonbeams glance
And glimmer on the black expanse,
The deep-drowned shadows rise and dance
Under the cypress trees.

Who passes on the road beneath
The moss-hung branches holds his breath,
As one who looks on grisly death
Shudders at what he sees.

But when the other shadows wake,
My lover rises from the lake,
And comes to me for love's sweet sake
From out his watery bed.

So I, though others watch no more
The moon on haunted Lake Lagore,
Walk nightly there, and on the shore
Keep vigil with the dead.

Hammer of Cain

By ***JAMES CAUSEY***
and
BILL BLACKBEARD

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

He told how murderers walk the earth
Beneath the curse of Cain
With crimson clouds before their eyes
And flames about their brain:
For blood has left upon their soul
Its everlasting stain. —Hood

Have you ever wondered what became of that most famous hammer . . .!

ROGER CAIN came out of the hospital room very slowly. He stood there, staring unseeingly down the hall. "One month," he murmured.

He began walking stiffly down the corridor.

Sheila was down in the reception room waiting for him, and at sight of her standing there, golden hair like a coronal about her pale lovely face, Roger swallowed hard and, briefly, envied his brother.

"Roger!" She was standing in front of him, blue eyes wide. "Kirk! Is he—"

She waited.

Roger forced a grin. "Swell, kid. *This* operation was it. He'll be walking in a month, the doc said."

"Without—canes?"

He nodded.

The blue eyes were brimming with tears. She was smiling. She started past him. Roger said: "You've only got five minutes—"

"Five minutes'll be enough," she whispered.

He could hear the sharp staccato of her footsteps as she broke into a run. He stared after her.

"Damn," Roger said very softly.

He put on his hat, went out.

It was damned hard to be jealous of your brother when he hadn't walked in two years. But that clause in Dad's will . . . *he* appointed executor of the estate, until such time as Kirk would walk again. *Why* had Kirk liked riding horses anyway? Until he could walk again, neither he nor Roger could touch the principal, except for doctor bills, the servants' salaries and so forth. The bank's monthly check-up took care of that.

He wondered, dully, if Sheila knew he loved her.

Go home, that was it! And then get drunk. Kirk'll be walking again in four weeks. Kirk—big, square-faced and handsome, with Sheila as his bride. While *he* ate his heart out—

"Oh, to hell with it," he said aloud. Go home, sure—and have Banners inquire "if Marster Kirk will be home soon, sir? Ah, fine. And there were those house bills you were supposed to see to. Cook said to remind you. You mustn't forget your responsibilities."

Roger had a better idea.

Go and see Ronnie. Good old Ronnie Hawker, writer of horror fiction extraordinary. He always had a sympathetic shoulder to weep on.

"Rye—" muttered Roger happily as he hailed a cab. "Straight!"

"Hi, Hawker, thou hack!"

"Hello old stench." The big sandy-haired man at the table recommenced typing in machine-gun bursts. He waved affably at the wine-cabinet in the corner of the apartment. "Help yourself."

Roger was already doing so.

Glug. Glug. The amber fluid gurgled pleasantly from the decanter. Roger felt better already.

"Ronnie."

"Uh-huh?" Ronnie Hawker kept on typing.

"What would you do if you were in love, and—there was a guy going to marry the gal?"

"Kill him, of course," Ronnie said absently.

Roger brooded blackly. "Uh-uh," he said unhappily, pouring himself another drink. "Won't do. He's my brother."

Taktaktak-ting! went the typewriter.

And so encouraged, Roger unburdened himself.

"Say!" He stood up, a good ten minutes, and half as many drinks later. "I don't think you're even listening."

Taktaktak—brzzzp—ting!

"Damned tab," muttered Hawker, pulling on his moustache and glaring at a half-filled page. Roger looked over the big man's shoulder. He chuckled.

"What's wrong?" Ronnie scowled.

"What a rotten way to make a living!"

"Huh?"

"Writing that tripe. Ronald, old man, you've degenerated into an amateur Damon Runyon. You can't write supernatural stuff that way."

"You'd be surprised, Mister. The incongruity of style makes it one helluva lot more effective than 'On that dark and stormy night with the wind howling across the plain like the plaint of a fiend, I went forth to keep a devil's rendezvous'—hey! You're not listening."

Ronnie leaned back in his chair. "See those?"

Roger Cain looked around the little apartment. At the rows of ancient moldy books lining the walls. He stepped over to one, blinking. He snorted. "Demonology. Vampirism." He indicated a little dragon-shaped clock on the mantel. "I suppose a sorcerer gave you that."

Hawker chuckled. "Suppose," he said blandly, "if I were to tell you *all* my stuff—everything I write, is founded on truth. A fact basis—"

Roger's laughter cut him short.

"You might make your living that way, old bean. But don't try to make *me* swallow that rot."

"There are more things in heaven and earth—"

"Nuts!" Roger took another drink.

Ronnie sat looking at him a moment.

"Skeptical, aren't you?" His voice was very soft.

"Not skeptical. I just don't believe in—"

"Curses?"

"Well—yes." Roger did not see Hawker's eyes narrow. His smile. A curiously unpleasant smile.

"Collect old weapons, don't you, Roger?"

"Primitive ones." Roger nodded indifferently, then blinked. "Why? You've got . . ."

He broke off, staring, as Ronnie opened a drawer. He licked his lips, avidly.

"Guess how old it is," Ronnie drawled.

"I don't know. Gosh, early Paleothic?"

"Much, much older than that. Suppose I were to tell you that the first murder—the very first—was committed with this."

Roger, however, was paying no attention. Almost reverently, he was examining the little flint hatchet. Its head, he noticed, was worn, age-blackened. More of a hammer than a hatchet, he observed professionally. The handle was doubtless a restoration job. This thing was *old*.

"Where'd you get it?"

Hawker's smile vanished abruptly. "Trade secret. You . . . ah . . . know of my reputation for *authenticity* in the fantasy field. Well—" He looked furtive, started to say something else, then didn't.

"Hope it looks good in your collection."

"You—you mean—"

"Sure. I want you to have it, old man. Ah . . . what's your last name—Cain? Splendid. This should be a very noble experiment indeed—"

But this last was in a whisper and Roger, absorbed in his new possession, scarcely heard it.

II

"CATCH, Banners."

Roger threw his hat at the butler and started briskly up the stairs. Banners caught the hat with the ease born of long practice, and inquired imperturbedly: "How is Kirk, sir?"

Roger's shoulder sagged. He remembered.

"Swell!" he said, trying to make it sound cheerful. "He'll be home in a few days. And walking in a month. . . ."

At the top of the stairs an animated bundle of white fur, lolling red tongue, and shrill yelping, almost knocked him down. Tinker. Kirk's Pomeranian. Roger, grinning, rubbed Tinker's ears the wrong way, and went into his study.

The walls were lined with racks of weapons. The head of some long-dead Cro-Magnon's spear, knives from the early Bronze Age, flint hatchets from the late Neolithic.

"Funny," Roger murmured.

The little hatchet was *cold*. Like—well, not like ice. Imagination sure played some funny tricks on a guy.

Abruptly he felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle, as of a cold wind. He glanced around the room. He went to the door, looked down the hall.

Nobody.

Feeling a trifle foolish, Roger took the little weapon and started to place it next to a beautiful American Indian Tomahawk. Strange, how when you held something like this that just *seemed* to fit your hand, you—

Roger Cain dropped the hatchet very quickly. He looked down at it and moistened his lips.

"Mustn't get impulses like that," he said to himself.

It was Monday. Monday afternoon, and Kirk was coming home.

The whole household bustled with activity. Mrs. Mulvaney, the cook, was buzzing about downstairs, making everything nice "for Mister Kirk's bedroom." Banners was doing his part with great efficiency and dispatch. Only Roger was restless.

Kirk was a swell guy. Fine, strong cheerful Kirk. Who had never complained—but why should he complain? When he had a girl like Sheila in love with him!

Roger strode upstairs to his study, slowly, wearily.

"What the devil—"

He swallowed hard, and took a step forward. He smiled then, decided it must be some trick of the late afternoon sunlight.

No reason why the head of the hatchet should look as though it were carved out of blood.

There was the sudden clamor of Sheila's horn outside, and Tinker's frantic joyous barking downstairs. Roger put on a good face and went down to help bring his brother in.

Kirk was home.

THAT night they had supper together. The three of them. Kirk, handsome, smiling, in his wheelchair. Sheila beside him, her face radiant. Rogers' dark thin face was impassive, as he miserably thought that he had never seen her so beautiful.

". . . tell you yet?" Kirk was saying.

Roger started. "What?"

"Sheila's finally set our wedding date! Third Sunday in November!"

"Oh—fine," Roger said with false heartiness, fiddling with his dessert, and watching Kirk scratch Tinker behind the ears. "Swell, old man!"

Kirk looked up at them, grinning bashfully, and set Tinker down on the floor. "Great little guy," he said. "Somebody said once that Pomeranians are ignorant, but—"

"But Tinker isn't!" said Roger and Sheila in chorus.

"Nuts," said Kirk defensively. "Dog's man's best friend—"

He broke off, and he and Sheila were both looking at each other over the white tablecloth, and not saying anything.

Roger got up, unobtrusively. "I got some work to do, you guys. House expenses . . . see that he gets to bed, Sheila. Not supposed to be hobbling around on those crutches any more'n he has to. 'Night, love birds—"

And he started out, a smile on his lips, but an icy painful sensation gnawing deep inside him.

He looked back once. He could see

Tinker, gnawing industriously on a bone underneath the table.

So Kirk *liked* Tinker! Well.

Before going to bed, Roger Cain managed, without being seen, to filch a choice hunk of steak from the refrigerator and carry it upstairs, where he placed it in a strategic spot by the doorway.

And that was the night Roger slept with the hatchet under his pillow.

It was shortly after midnight when he awoke.

There was a quick, eager sniffing, and he saw Tinker come nosing past the doorway to stop, peer about inquisitively.

So Kirk *liked* Tinker.

Roger threw the covers back swiftly. The handle of the hatchet was warm and smooth against his palm.

Smiling, he shuffled across the floor on bare feet, closed the door.

"Here, Tinker. Come on, boy."

Tinker looked up—and froze. He stood like that perhaps three seconds, head up, one paw half-raised. A low querulous whine came from his throat.

"Come on fella," whispered Roger. "Atta doggie—"

He lunged. Tinker went backward. Fast. Whimpering, tongue half out, paws scrabbling on the floor.

Ah, this was living! To have something scrambling away from you, whining, afraid. To feel the blood coursing hot through your veins—

Roger swung the hatchet.

Tinker tried to dodge aside, paws skidding on the waxed wood, a howl beginning deep inside him that choked off . . .

Roger stood up.

He looked down at the little Pomeranian, eyes bulging, still in death, a small furry bundle lying half in, half out, the patch of moonlight on the floor.

Roger Cain's mouth twisted in revulsion. *Why had he—*

He strode to the window, tried to hurl the hatchet out. He couldn't. It wouldn't *leave* his hand.

Instead, quite unconsciously and without his volition, he took the small stone hatchet and placed it gently in its rack with the rest of his collection.

Then, sweating—he took the dead dog and threw him out of the window, into the flower garden. After carefully wiping all noticeable stains from the floor he smiled and went to bed.

III

NEXT morning Roger went down to breakfast late, with not a care in the world. He was whistling. Once he swallowed, almost choked as he remembered, then laughed and went back to gouging the grapefruit with his spoon.

"Just a dream," he said.

But after breakfast he went outside, and walked nonchalantly around the house by the garden.

He stopped, nodded affably to the gardener. "Morning, Simpson."

The gardener, a broad hulking fellow with an ordinarily beet-red complexion, stared at him. His face was white.

"What's the matter?"

Simpson said nothing. He raised a small white Pomeranian by the hind leg for Rogers' inspection. The dog's skull was split open.

"I found him, Mister Cain," Simpson said awkwardly. "In the flower bed."

Roger moistened his lips. He tried to speak, but couldn't. Simpson was staring at him.

"This was Mister Kirk's pooch, wasn't it?"

"Uh—yes," Roger said. "Kirk's pooch."

He turned, walked stiffly away, leaving Simpson staring after him.

"No dream," he whispered.

That stone hatchet!

It was rather hard—telling Kirk about

the dog. His brother lay there, staring up at him tightly, his eyes big and dark, his mouth pinched.

"Who did it, Rog?"

Roger said he didn't know, tried to look appropriately doleful. "He was probably outside in the street—maybe a car hit him," he said.

"He didn't go outside," said Kirk, looking at him oddly.

Roger licked his lips. "Then maybe he fell out the window."

He went out.

Later that morning he went out to see Ronnie. He talked about inconsequential things for awhile, and finally got up the courage to say: "Ronnie . . ."

"Yes?" The big man was sitting over by the fireplace, smiling lazily at him. Was there a faint hint of—mockery in his eyes?

"Well—" He hesitated, went on "It's about that hatchet."

"What about it?"

"That's what *I* want to know, dammit. What's wrong with the thing—"

"Eh?" Hawker's face was bland, innocent. "What could be wrong with it, old man. Just an ordinary flint hatchet—old, but—"

"It's hexed!" Roger blurted out, and instantly felt like a fool.

"Oh, come now." Roger could sense the laughter behind his friend's voice. "You, the boy who doesn't believe in witchcraft. Curses. Your nerves must be shot, old man. Too much worrying. You're jealous—"

"I'm *not* jealous!" Roger bit his lip. Hawker was making a fool out of him. "You made some funny cracks that other day—"

"Did I?"

"Hell, yes, you did! Do you talk, or—"

"Sure," Ronnie said, suddenly amiable. "I'll talk. But you won't believe me."

"Go on."

Hawker went over to a bookshelf. He brought an old dusty tome over to the table, flipped open its pages. "Here. Read aloud, Roger."

"What's this? A bible—"

"One of many." Hawker fingered his moustache urbanely. "You'd be surprised if I told you how many bibles exist. Read."

Frowning, Roger read.

". . . and while Abel was kneeling with folded hands before the altar of his Sacrifice, the smoke of his sacrifice ascended toward heaven and the savor thereof pleased God, while that of Cain—who made his offering with an unwilling heart, was scattered over the Earth.

"His heart burning with rage and envy, Cain took up a stone, and slew his brother Abel."

"What's this about a stone—"

"That's a very old bible," said Hawker quietly. "You'd be quite surprised to learn how I obtained it."

"But I fail to see—"

"Quiet." There were little mocking lights in Hawker's eyes. "Suppose I were to tell you that the hatchet you possess was carved *from the stone which Cain used.*"

Roger started to say "Rubbish"—and didn't. Ronnie Hawker's smiling face seemed a wooden mask. This wasn't the friend he knew; it was some stranger.

Ancestral memory—curses. . . . Ancient, withered crones with toothless gums muttering strange rituals beneath a gibbous moon. Things of the darkness, of the night —*there are more things in heaven and earth*—

Somewhere, an auto horn honked. There were the distant sounds of noonday traffic, the shrilling of some cop's whistle. With an effort, Roger grinned shakily, said: "Rot, Ronnie! This is nineteen-forty-three—"

"Still skeptical, aren't you? And suppose I pointed out the analogy—you, having a brother. Jealousy. And your last name. Cain. Supposing I told you that all

the descendants of Cain bearing his name are susceptible to the influence of that hatchet."

Roger glared at him, not quite sure whether or not he was joking.

"Got quite a sense of humor, haven't you?"

"Quite." Ronnie put the bible away carefully, blew thick dust from the bookshelf, then showed Roger to the door. "Now, if you'll excuse me. I'm writing a yarn about a skeptical guy—just like you. You've just gotta read it when it comes out, and see what happens to the poor fellow. Very interesting."

Out on the sidewalk Roger turned and looked back at the closed doorway. Ronnie was pulling his leg. Sure. Just his nerves. You did a lot of funny things, walking in your sleep—

That night, Roger did.

IV

IT WAS a strange dream. About Sheila, Kirk, and a sharp little hatchet. An ancient wailing of desolation and hatred. . . . There was something he had to do! Something about the hatchet—and Kirk.

Roger Cain awoke.

The moonlight was silver on Kirk's pillows, on his upturned, sleeping face, and what was he doing *here,* in Kirk's bedroom. With the hatchet in his hand! Raising it over his brother's head, and laughing, soundlessly—

God! And in that instant Roger swiftly threw the hatchet out of the window.

It was as if an intolerable weight had been lifted from his mind. He was free again, to think, clearly. An immensely relieved Roger Cain crept silently back to bed. He was free!

Things went along splendidly the next few weeks. Sheila was in the house constantly, and lavished infinite attention on Kirk. Roger found himself jealous no longer.

"Great pair of kids," he told himself. "Deserve all the happiness they get." He was trying to forget about Tinker. And the hatchet. Besides—you couldn't be influenced by something you didn't have.

Came the day when Roger came back from a visit with Kirk's doctor. He was whistling, as he swung up the big stone steps to the house, tossed his hat to Meadows, and hurried to Kirk's room.

"Kirk! Hey, wake up, boy!" He shook him awake and chuckled merrily as Kirk blinked, sat up and dug the sleep out of his eyes.

"Whatsa idea of waking a guy out of a sound sleep—Say, Rog! You been drinking?"

Roger Cain laughed, richly, warmly. "No, but it's a good idea. Celebrate—" He broke off. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"You'll be walking soon! Matter of days now. I talked with Van Horn at the hospital just an hour ago. Here—won't need these any more—" And chuckling, he seized his brother's canes in the corner of the bedroom, and broke them.

"Hey, dammit, I need those!"

"Nuts. Here." And Roger threw the covers back, urged Kirk to a standing position. "Lean on me, old son . . ."

And supporting Kirk halfway, Roger marched him around the bed.

Gasping, Kirk sank back on the covers and stared up at him. "I walked." His voice was awed, husky. "I—walked! Today's my lucky day, all right."

Kirk looked ruminatively at his big toe. "Sheila advanced our wedding date. A week sooner than we figured."

"Oh," Roger said faintly.

Kirk looked up at him and the pattern of freckles across his nose stretched wide as he grinned, embarrassedly. "Well—how about congratulating me?"

"Huh? Oh, sure. Sure! Best of everything. Look—" He started out awkwardly.

"I got to see about some bills 'n stuff. . . ."

"Sure," Roger said softly to himself for the dozenth time. "I'm glad for him. Deserves a gal like Sheila—"

He went into his study, sat down at the desk. He looked over at the vacant space in his collection of hammers and smiled.

"I am *not* jealous."

He winced as he realized he'd spoken aloud.

Rapraprap.

"Come in."

It was Banners. He was carrying a proud, half-apologetic smile, and—

Roger Cain stared, aghast.

And a little, flint-headed hatchet.

"Here, sir—" Banners was saying. His words seemed loose, very disconnected. ". . . found it in the back yard. Undoubtedly yours—lost from your collection—"

Roger Cain nodded. He licked his lips. The hatchet. Here on his desk. Small, sharp, *old*—

He did not even know when Banners went out. He only sat there, staring.

"Get a grip on yourself," he whispered.

He took a deep breath and forced himself to move forward—

THE moment he touched the hatchet everything was changed. No more fear. Strange. He felt *reassured*. Confident.

He hefted the hatchet, swung it experimentally through the air, and, his heart pounding, stood up. He was thinking suddenly of Kirk. Kirk, whom he hated, who would take Sheila away from him!

Roger went downstairs quietly, opened the door to his brother's room.

Kirk was standing there at the foot of the bed, grinning, trying his unsupported weight on his right foot.

"I can stand!" he was whispering. "I can sta—"

He turned. He blinked, puzzledly.

Roger Cain stepped forward, gripping the hatchet tightly.

His arm rose and fell. Rose and fell—

Afterward, Roger Cain stood staring down at Kirk. At the hatchet in his hand. The heavy, helpful hatchet –

Walk.

Walk to Ronnie's house. Good old Ronnie. The boy with the sense of humor. With the oh so splendid sense of humor! Teaching him about curses the hard way.

Roger hammered on the door.

Ronnie opened it a moment later, and quickly tried to slam it shut, but Roger stuck his foot in the crack. He forced his way in.

"Hello, Ronnie."

Ronnie Hawker's face was a sickly gray. He backed away slowly, eyes fixed on the red stains on Roger's fingers. "What do you want?"

"You know what I want," said Roger. He pulled the hatchet from beneath his coat.

"Don't!" Hawker's lips writhed. He was speaking very rapidly. "Don't, Cain, I—"

"*Cain.* That's right. Rub it in." Roger's grin was tight, set. He moved forward. "Well, Ronnie, you proved your point all right. Didn't count on it backfiring, did you?"

"I only did it for a joke! I had to find out—"

"A *joke,*" said Roger. "Oh, fine!"

He heard the sudden laughter—the distorted, insane laughter, everywhere about him. His own laughter.

"I like jokes, old man!" he heard himself gasp. "You've no idea how I appreciate a good prank. Too bad this one'll be on you—"

"No!" The big man's eyes were two shiny black marbles of fear. His face was contorted. "*No*—"

"Oh, *yes.*"

Hawker tried suddenly to run, to dart past him to the door. So very funny.

After he fell down the first time Roger

bent over and systematically hacked Ronnie's features into something quite unrecognizable.

"What a shame," he murmured, looking sadly at the blood on Hawker's clean gray tweeds.

He laid the hatchet delicately down on the table, and stepped into the bathroom. He found what he was looking for. Ronnie's straight-edge razor. He opened the veins in his wrists. A matter of minutes, now.

He frowned at the hatchet. Get rid of it! Destroy, burn—

Roger heard sounds outside, and unsteadily made his way to the window. A refuse truck, stopping in front of the house! Two trash men, unloading the cans of junk on the curb.

Weakening, feeling his life drain away, drop by ruby drop, Roger still had enough wits about him to throw the hatchet.

He made it. He saw the hatchet fly fair and true, to bury itself deep in the refuse heaped high in the back of the truck.

Presently the truck rumbled on down the street. Roger Cain fell back with something like a smile on his lips.

The hatchet. Gone.

No one else would it influence, no other brother named Cain . . . to destroy—

Roger's eyes closed. In the little apartment there was silence.

V

CHARLEY KANE shifted his cud of tobacco to his left cheek, spat vigorously. He glanced sideways at Will, who jammed on the brakes and jumped to the ground. Charley sang out: "Ready, Will?"

"Let 'er go!"

Charley pulled the lever, his faded old eyes surveying the vast dump heap in front of him. The truck shuddered as the mass of assorted rubbish slid off. Will immediately attacked the pile with his shovel. Charley stepped down, took his own shovel and pitched in. For a time the two brothers worked in silence. Eleven years now, that Will and Charley had been on the same dump truck together. Working side by side.

But just now the smooth efficiency of the team was broken. Charley stopped shoveling a moment. Slowly, deliberately, he bent over and picked up a small object from the ashes.

"A hammer," he muttered.

Oddly shaped head. Sharp, sort of. And strangely wet and sticky . . .

"Hey, loafer!" Will rubbed sweat from his brow. "You gonna help me or not?"

Without looking up, caressing the handle of the little hatchet, Charley said very softly: "Jest a minute, Will."

His brother grunted, swore disgustedly and went back to his shoveling.

Presently the job was done. Will gave Charley a puzzled glance, went back to the side of the truck, where he hung up his shovel.

"You coming or not?"

Charley was smiling now.

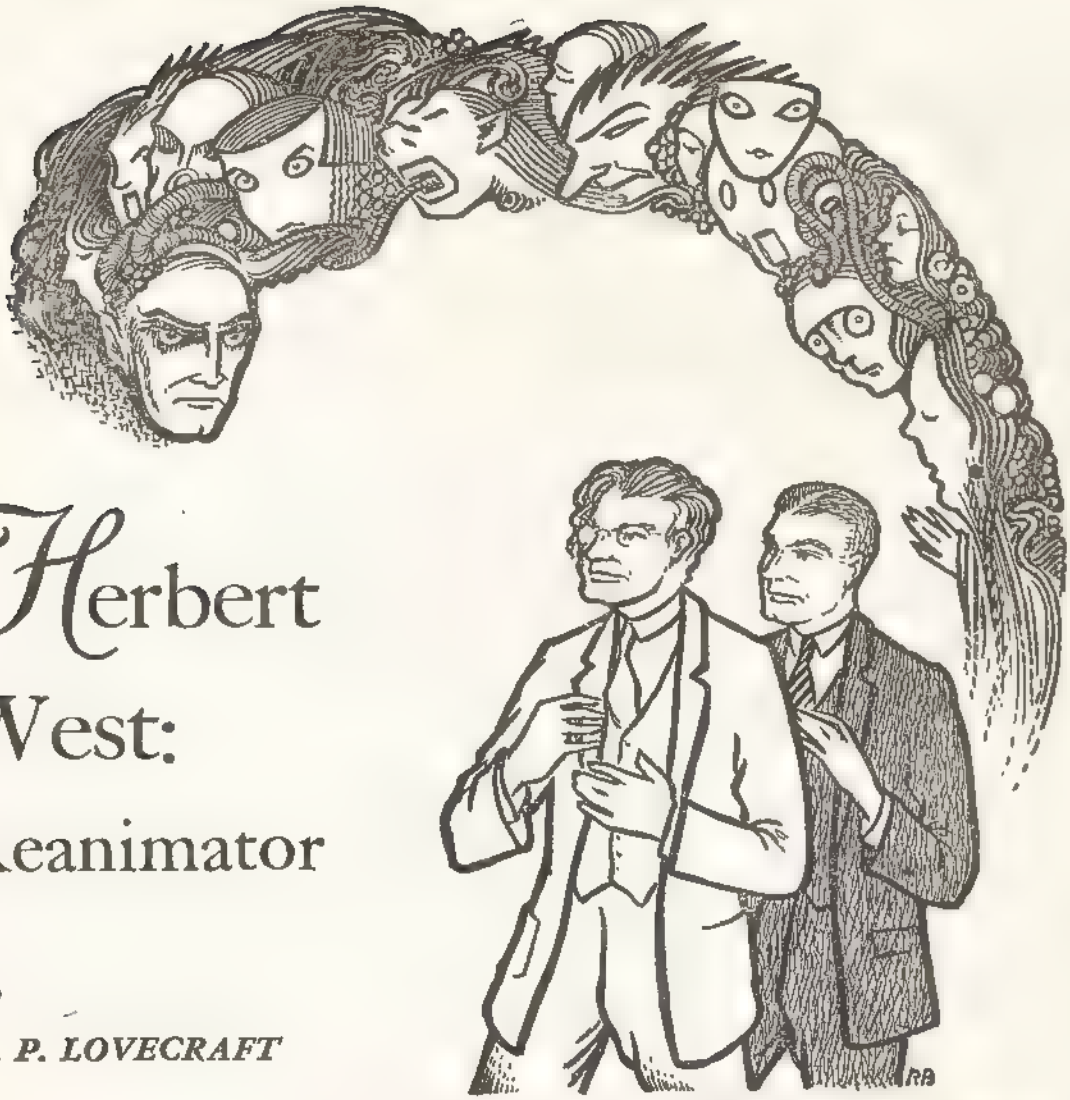
"Yeah," he said. "I'm coming."

Will's constant nagging—constant, biting insults. Funny, he hadn't noticed them before . . . indeed, he hadn't known what to do. But he knew now.

His breath hoarse in his throat, aware of the "hammer's" weight, cool and comfortable in his right hand, Charley stepped around the side of the truck.

Will turned, hearing his brother's quick, shuffling footsteps. He had time only to open his mouth wide and yell once, before Charley stepped forward, his right arm high.

He brought the hatchet down—



Herbert West: Reanimator

By

H. P. LOVECRAFT

Heading by RICHARD BENNETT

VI. The Tomb-Legions

WHEN Dr. Herbert West disappeared a year ago, the Boston police questioned me closely. They suspected that I was holding something back, and perhaps suspected even graver things; but I could not tell them the truth because they would not have believed it. They knew, indeed, that West had been connected with activities beyond the credence of ordinary men; for his hideous experiments in the reanimation of dead bodies had long been too extensive to admit of perfect secrecy; but the final soul-shattering catastrophe held elements of demoniac phantasy which make even me doubt the reality of what I saw.

I was West's closest friend and only confidential assistant. We had met years

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before, in medical school, and from the first I had shared his terrible researches. He had slowly tried to perfect a solution which, injected into the veins of the newly deceased, would restore life; a labor demanding an abundance of fresh corpses and therefore involving the most unnatural actions. Still more shocking were the products of some of the experiments—grisly masses of flesh that had been dead, but that West waked to a blind, brainless, nauseous animation. These were the usual results, for in order to reawaken the mind it was necessary to have specimens so absolutely fresh that no decay could possibly affect the delicate brain cells.

This need for very fresh corpses had been West's moral undoing. They were hard to get, and one awful day he had secured his specimen while it was still alive and vigorous. A struggle, a needle, and a powerful alkaloid had transformed it to a very fresh corpse, and the experiment had succeeded for a brief and memorable moment; but West had emerged with a soul calloused and seared, and a hardened eye which sometimes glanced with a kind of hideous and calculating appraisal at men of especially sensitive brain and especially vigorous physique. Toward the last I became acutely afraid of West, for he began to look at me that way. People did not seem to notice his glances, but they noticed my fear; and after his disappearance used that as a basis for some absurd suspicions.

West, in reality, was more afraid than I; for his abominable pursuits entailed a life of furtiveness and dread of every shadow. Partly it was the police that he feared; but sometimes his nervousness was deeper and more nebulous, touching on certain indescribable things into which he had injected a morbid life, and from which he had not seen that life depart. He usually finished his experiments with a revolver, but a few times he had not been quick enough. There was that first specimen on whose rifled grave marks of claw-

ing were later seen. There was also that Arkham professor's body which had done cannibal things before it had been captured and thrust unidentified into a madhouse cell at Sefton, where it beat the walls for sixteen years. Most of the other possibly surviving results were things less easy to speak of—for in later years West's scientific zeal had degenerated to an unhealthy and fantastic mania, and he had spent his chief skill in vitalizing not entire human bodies but isolated parts of bodies, or parts joined to organic matter other than human. It had become fiendishly disgusting by the time he disappeared; many of the experiments could not even be hinted at in print. The Great War, through which both of us served as surgeons, had intensified this side of West.

IN SAYING that West's fear of his specimens was nebulous. I have in mind particularly its complex nature. Part of it came merely from knowing of the existence of such nameless monsters, while another part arose from apprehension of the bodily harm they might under certain circumstances do him. Their disappearance added horror to the situation—of them all West knew the whereabouts of only one, the pitiful asylum thing. Then there was a more subtle fear—a very fantastic sensation resulting from a curious experiment in the Canadian army in 1915. West, in the midst of a severe battle, had reanimated Major Sir Eric Moreland Clapham-Lee, D. S. O., a fellow-physician who knew about his experiments and could have duplicated them. The head had been removed, so that the possibilities of quasi-intelligent life in the trunk might be investigated. Just as the building was wiped out by a German shell, there had been a success. The trunk had moved intelligently; and, unbelievable to relate, we were both sickeningly sure that articulate sounds had come from the detached head as it lay in a shadowy corner of the labo-

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ratory. The shell had been merciful, in a way—but West could never feel as certain as he wished, that we two were the only survivors. He used to make shuddering conjectures about the possible actions of a headless physician with the power of reanimating the dead.

West's last quarters were in a venerable house of much elegance, overlooking one of the oldest burying grounds in Boston. He had chosen the place for purely symbolic and fantastically aesthetic reasons, since most of the interments were of the Colonial period and therefore of little use to a scientist seeking very fresh bodies. The laboratory was in a sub-cellar secretly constructed by imported workmen, and contained a huge incinerator for the quiet and complete disposal of such bodies, or fragments and synthetic mockeries of bodies, as might remain from the morbid experiments and unhallowed amusements of the owner. During the excavation of this cellar the workmen had struck some exceedingly ancient masonry; undoubtedly connected with the old burying ground, yet far too deep to correspond with any known sepulchre therein. After a number of calculations West decided that it represented some secret chamber beneath the tomb of the Averills, where the last interment had been made in 1768. I was with him when he studied the nitrous, dripping walls laid bare by the spades and mattocks of the men, and was prepared for the gruesome thrill which would attend the uncovering of centuried grave-secrets; but for the first time West's new timidity conquered his natural curiosity, and he betrayed his degenerating fibre by ordering the masonry left intact and plastered over. Thus it remained till that final hellish night, part of the walls of the secret laboratory. I speak of West's decadence, but must add that it was a purely mental and intangible thing. Outwardly he was the same to the last—calm, cold, slight, and yellow-haired, with spectacled blue eyes and a general aspect of youth which years and

fears seemed never to change. He seemed calm even when he thought of that clawed grave and looked over his shoulder; even when he thought of the carnivorous thing that gnawed and pawed at Sefton bars.

The end of Herbert West began one evening in our joint study when he was dividing his curious glance between the newspaper and me. A strange headline item had struck at him from the crumpled pages, and a nameless titan claw had seemed to reach down through sixteen years. Something fearsome and incredible had happened at Sefton Asylum fifty miles away, stunning the neighborhood and baffling the police. In the small hours of the morning a body of silent man had entered the grounds and their leader had aroused the attendants. He was a menacing military figure who talked without moving his lips and whose voice seemed almost ventriloquially connected with an immense black case he carried. His expressionless face was handsome to the point of radiant beauty, but had shocked the superintendent when the hall light fell on it—for it was a wax face with eyes of painted glass. Some nameless accident had befallen this man. A larger man guided his steps; a repellant hulk whose bluish face seemed half eaten away by some unknown malady. The speaker had asked for the custody of the cannibal monster committed from Arkham sixteen years before; and upon being refused, gave a signal which precipitated a shocking riot. The fiends had beaten, trampled, and bitten every attendant who did not flee; killing four and finally succeeding in the liberation of the monster. These victims who could recall the event without hysteria swore that the creatures had acted less like men than like unthinkable automata guided by the wax-faced leader. By the time help could be summoned, every trace of the men and of their mad charge had vanished.

From the hour of reading this item until midnight, West sat almost para-

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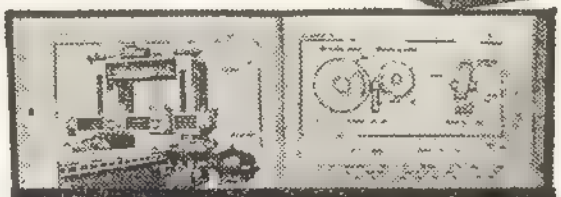

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lyzed. At midnight the doorbell rang, startling him fearfully. All the servants were asleep in the attic, so I answered the bell. As I have told the police, there was no wagon in the street; but only a group of strange-looking figures bearing a large square box which they deposited in the hallway after one of them had grunted in a highly unnatural voice, "Express—prepaid." They filed out of the house with a jerky tread, and as I watched them go I had an odd idea that they were turning toward the ancient cemetery on which the back of the house abutted. When I slammed the door after them West came downstairs and looked at the box. It was about two feet square, and bore West's correct name and present address. It also bore the inscription, "From Eric Moreland Clapham-Lee St. Eloi, Flanders." Six years before, in Flanders, a shelled hospital had fallen upon the headless reanimated trunk of Dr. Clapham-Lee, and upon the detached head which—perhaps—had uttered articulate sounds.

West was not even excited now. His condition was more ghastly. Quickly he said, "It's the finish—but let's incinerate—this." We carried the thing down to the laboratory—listening. I do not remember many particulars — you can imagine my state of mind—but it is a vicious lie to say it was Herbert West's body which I put into the incinerator. We both inserted the whole unopened wooden box, closed the door, and started the electricity. Nor did any sound come from the box, after all.

It was West who first noticed the falling plaster on that part of the wall where the ancient tomb masonry had been covered up. I was going to run, but he stopped me. Then I saw a small black aperture, felt a ghoulish wind of ice, and smelled the charnel bowels of a putrescent earth. There was no sound, but just then the electric lights went out and I saw outlined against some phosphorescence of the nether world a horde of silent toiling

things which only insanity—or worse—could create. Their outlines were human, semi-human, fractionally human, and not human at all—the horde was grotesquely heterogeneous. They were removing the stones quietly, one by one, from the centuried wall. And then, as the breach became large enough, they came out into the laboratory in single file; led by a stalking thing with a beautiful head made of wax. A sort of mad-eyed monstrosity behind the leader seized on Herbert West. West did not resist or utter a sound. Then they all sprang at him and tore him to pieces before my eyes, bearing the fragments away into that subterranean vault of fabulous abominations. West's head was carried off by the wax-headed leader, who wore a Canadian officer's uniform. As it disappeared I saw that the blue eyes behind the spectacles were hideously blazing with their first touch of frantic, visible emotion.

Servants found me unconscious in the morning. West was gone. The incinerator contained only unidentifiable ashes. Detectives have questioned me, but what can I say? The Sefton tragedy they will not connect with West; not that, nor the men with the box, whose existence they deny. I told them of the vault, and they pointed to the unbroken plaster wall and laughed. So I told them no more. They imply that I am either a madman or a murderer—probably I am mad. But I might not be mad if those accursed tomb-legions had not been so silent.

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Enter John Thunstone

MANLY WADE WELLMAN, who, through the years, has given us some of our best and weirdest "weird" tales, has uncovered a new character in John Thunstone, introduced in *The Third Cry to Legba.*

This Thunstone being a likeable chap we're a bit worried on his account. To be sure, he's resourceful, as all who seriously study the mysteries of occultism, magic and the supernatural must be. But Mr. Wellman tells us that Thunstone, a man well able to take care of himself in all ordinary circumstances, insists on getting into the most outré and macabre scrapes. We'll hear of these in future issues of WEIRD TALES.

Says Wellman on the *Legba* story:

All of the characters in my story—including Legba—are founded on people I know, and any resemblance to actual persons and occurrences is as vivid as I can make it. Nobody will sue, however, because John Thunstone and Sharon, Countess of Monteseco, are in favor of this story, and Rowley Thorne is much too busy and harassed these days to pick any fresh fights.

It is a fact that something appeared recently in New York newspapers that might be the public version of *The Third Cry to Legba.* Some may remember an account of how a certain singer chanted black magic songs and attracted big audiences, including at least one attentive being that she must have wished would stay away. We can't check on that now, for the singer is untimely dead. I don't intend to cite any moral, for if my story or the newspaper yarn have morals, they are too obvious to be pointed out.

I mention several books, all of which are in existence and within reach of my hand as I write. The voodoo pantheon, including Legba, is also very real indeed to its worshippers. As to the actual Legba invocation, that is garbled somewhat. When you read my story, you will know my reason for garbling it.

Manly Wade Wellman.

Bradbury on a Bat

WE THINK you'll be interested in hearing something about the guy who has had stories in five of the last seven issues of WEIRD TALES. We like Ray Bradbury yarns and so, apparently do you readers. Here's this author's lowdown on himself:

Some of my first memories concern going upstairs at night and finding an unpleasant beast waiting at the next to the last step. Screaming, I'd run back down to mother. Then, together, we'd climb the stairs. Invariably, the monster would be gone. Mother never saw it. Sometimes I was irritated at her lack of imagination.

I imagine I should be thankful for my fear of the dark, though. You have to know fear and apprehension in some form before you can write about it thoroughly, and God knows my first ten years were full of the usual paraphernalia of ghosts and skeletons and dead men tumbling down the twisting interior of my mind. What a morbid little brat I must have been to have around.

One of the earliest bits of art I conceived was a crayon sketch of a dancing skeleton. I showed this to the girl next door, hoping to set her all aquiver with terror. She simply laughed.

I don't recall if I knocked her down, venting my disappointment, or whether I went off home to try and draw a more horrible sketch. Nevertheless, in the following years I became enamored of a stage play called *The Bat*. Borrowing the dark lining from an old opera cape of my grandmother's, I affixed myself into an umbrella-contrived framework and flapped all over the neighborhood in the autumn, leaving cryptic little notes of dire warning on the doorsteps of the local bullies.

Somehow, the bullies always guessed who it was that left the cryptic notes, and the next morning on the way to grammar school,

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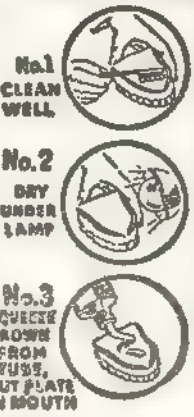

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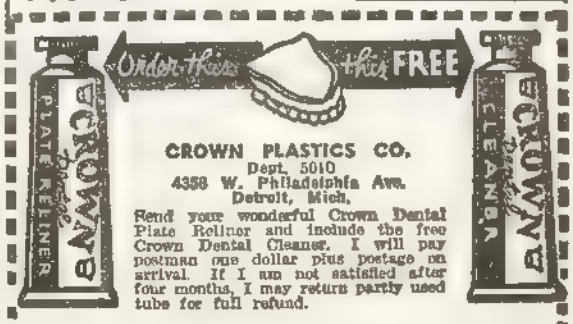

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they usually punched my nose or pushed me into the creek.

The following evening, naturally, bristling with the urge for revenge, I'd haul out my contraption and make like a membraned mammal around the town; much to the dismay of mother, who had raised her child to be a Baptist instead of a Bat.

In 1932, when I was twelve, my parents presented me with a toy dial-typewriter, which I kicked around. I couldn't afford to buy many books, so I found it possible to read the sequels to Edgar Rice Burroughs' many books, by a very simple method. I wrote the sequels myself. They were quite crude, admittedly; but what they lacked in style they made up for with large gobs of Freudian sex.

During those same years I did many haphazard things, none of which seems to fit into any logical pattern.

I've written something every day for the last seven years. It adds up to quite a stack, and perhaps explains the current paper shortage.

My urge for the unusual was stimulated first by the Oz books, then by Tarzan, then by Buck Rogers, and finally the weird and fantasy publications. Every action of my life thereafter seems to point inevitably to my writing the more outré kinds of fiction.

I'd like to continue writing along the line where I've begun my story series. I don't particularly care about ghosts, vampires or werewolves; they've been killed by repetition. Lovecraft, Poe and C. A. Smith are the rare ones who did a splendid job by them. There are plenty of good stories in neurotic psychology ready to be used. There are good stories in everyday things. Trains, crowds, motor-cars, submarines, dogs—the wind around the house. I'd like to use them more. And there's much good stuff buried in the green leafs of childhood and the heaped dead leafs of old age. I want to get at that, too. I want to write about humans; and add an unusual, unsuspected twist.

That's about all. Except that I'd like to thank Robert A. Heinlein, Henry Kuttner and Leigh Brackett for their friendly interest and helpful words.

And thanks to my mother, who, with unbelievable patience has tolerated the Bat's continuance of life all these years.

Ray Bradbury.

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Formulas on Black Magic

A short time ago a letter of mine appeared in this magazine. I asked for various formulas on Black Magic. I received many but in an accident my correspondence file was destroyed. Many of those who wrote, consequently, received no answer. Any of those whom I didn't answer who wish to rewrite and enclose again the formulas they sent are invited to, and I promise to answer these. Any others who have such formulas or know of books I can secure that contain them are also asked to write.

There are also two or three other things I wish to secure. Three or four samples of Mandrake root, white resin and I need some bats' blood. This may seem silly but the only way one can investigate these things is to try them out. So anyone who knows where I can get these please write.

Rodney Lee Stimson, D.B.A.,
17 Beacon Avenue, Auburn, Maine.

READERS' VOTE

THE VALLEY OF THE ASSASSINS
DEATH WENT THAT WAY
SPEED THE PARTING GHOST
THE THIRD CRY TO LEGBA
THE DUCKER
GREAT PAN IS HERE
A THIN GENTLEMAN WITH GLOVES
HAMMER OF CAIN
HERBERT WEST: REANIMATOR

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas?* That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

This *Free* Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show* you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. *Use the coupon below* and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed *free* book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.

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Scribe X. N. L., The Rosicrucians, AMORC, Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

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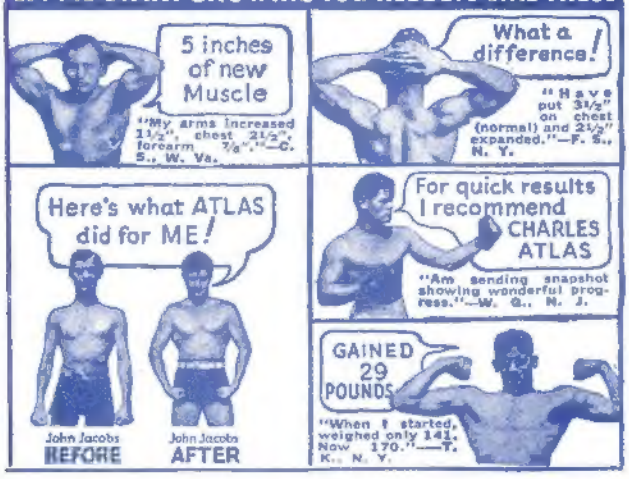
LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE



CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in international contest—in competition with ALL men who would consent to appear against him.

This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a new beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through *"Dynamic Tension,"* you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body — watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—*"Dynamic Tension"*—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of *"Dynamic Tension"* almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

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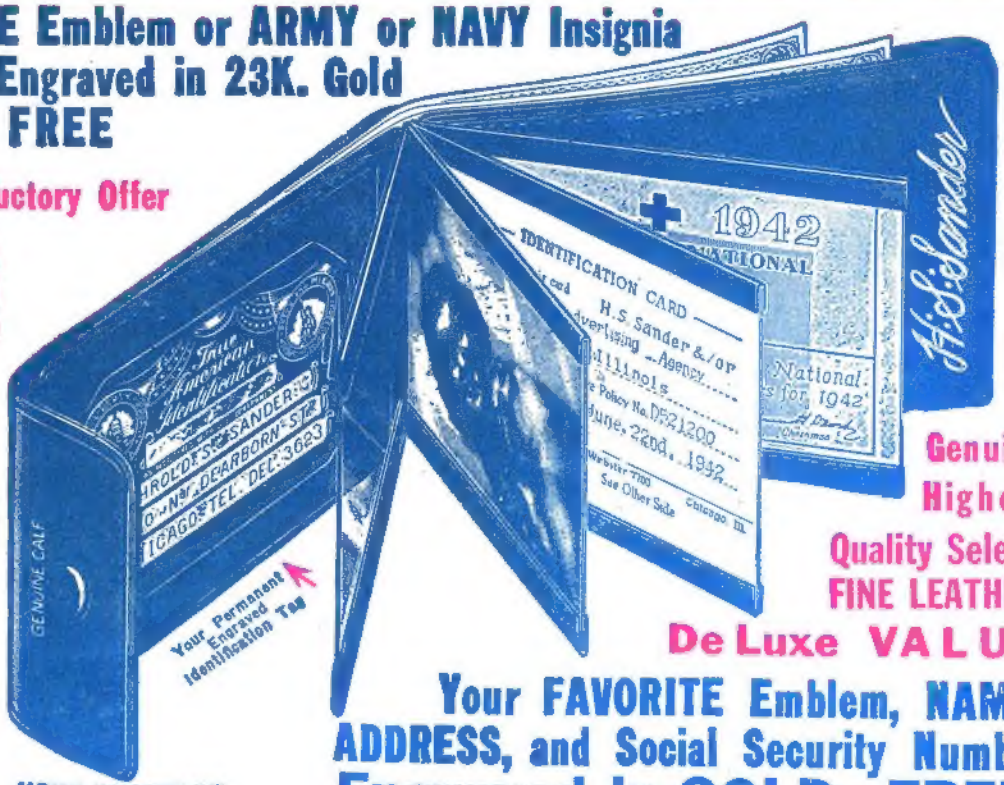

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